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Curtis Sergeant

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The Greatness of God and the Assurance It Brings: A Reflection on Isaiah 40:9-31

In a world that often feels overwhelming and uncertain, we need an anchor—something unshakable to hold onto. That anchor is the greatness of God. When we look to Him, when we meditate on His power, wisdom, and sovereignty, our fears and anxieties fade in the light of His majesty. Isaiah 40:9-31 is a powerful passage that reminds us of God's greatness and the assurance it brings to His people.

God's Power Declared (Isaiah 40:9-11)

"Go up on a high mountain, Zion, messenger of good news; raise your voice forcefully, Jerusalem, messenger of good news; raise it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!' Behold, the Lord God will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His compensation is with Him, and His reward before Him. Like a shepherd, He will tend His flock; in His arm, He will gather the lambs and carry them in the fold of His robe; He will gently lead the nursing ewes." (Isaiah 40:9-11, NASB)

The chapter begins with a proclamation: "*Here is your God!*" Isaiah calls for a bold declaration of God's greatness. He is not distant or indifferent—He comes with might, ruling with power, yet He is also a tender shepherd who gathers His people close to Him. What an incredible picture of our Lord! He is both mighty and compassionate, strong yet gentle, powerful yet personal.

This truth gives us great assurance. We are not left alone in our struggles. Our God, who holds all authority, also holds us close to His heart. In times of doubt, we can remind ourselves: *"Here is my God!"* He reigns, and He cares.

The Incomparable God (Isaiah 40:12-17)

Isaiah then invites us to consider God's supremacy:

"Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and measured the heavens with a span, and calculated the dust of the earth with a measure, and weighed the mountains in a balance and the hills in a pair of scales? Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counselor has informed Him?" (Isaiah 40:12-13, NASB)

God is beyond our comprehension. He holds the oceans in His hand, stretches out the heavens, and weighs the mountains. Compared to Him, the nations are like a drop in a bucket (v. 15). No one can instruct Him, and no human wisdom can improve upon His perfect understanding.

When life feels chaotic, we can rest in the fact that God is in control. His wisdom is infinite, His power is unmatched, and nothing in this world can threaten His sovereignty. If He governs the universe with such precision, surely He can handle the details of our lives.

The Folly of Idolatry (Isaiah 40:18-26)

Isaiah contrasts God's greatness with the futility of idols:

"To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him? As for the idol, a craftsman casts it; a goldsmith plates it with gold, and a silversmith fashions chains of silver." (Isaiah 40:18-19, NASB)

Idols—whether made of gold or the false securities we create for ourselves—are powerless. Yet, how often do we trust in things other than God? Money, status, relationships, or our own abilities can become idols when we rely on them more than Him.

Isaiah reminds us that God alone sits above the earth, stretching out the heavens like a curtain (v. 22). He calls each star by name and keeps them in place by His power (v. 26). Nothing and no one can compare to Him.

This truth assures us that when we place our trust in the Lord, we are standing on unshakable ground. We do not need to fear because our God is above all.

Strength for the Weary (Isaiah 40:27-31)

Finally, Isaiah speaks to those who feel weary and forgotten:

"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, does not become weary or tired. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives strength to the weary, and to the one who lacks might, He increases power." (Isaiah 40:28-29, NASB)

God never grows weary. His strength never diminishes. He is the source of all power, and He freely gives it to those who trust in Him.

The passage concludes with one of the most cherished promises in Scripture:

"*Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.*" (Isaiah 40:31, NASB)

Waiting on the Lord is not passive—it is an active trust, a confident expectation that He will sustain us. When we feel weak, exhausted, or discouraged, God renews our strength. He enables us to soar above our circumstances, to run the race of faith with endurance, and to keep walking when the road is long.

Living in the Assurance of God's Greatness

The greatness of God is not just a theological concept—it is a truth that changes everything. It means:

- We do not have to be afraid because God reigns.
- We do not have to rely on ourselves because He is strong.
- We do not have to worry about the future because He is sovereign.
- We do not have to give in to discouragement because He gives us strength.

When we focus on God's greatness, our burdens become lighter, our faith grows stronger, and our hearts find peace. The God who holds the universe together also holds you. Rest in Him today, knowing that His power, wisdom, and love will never fail.

"Here is your God!" Let that truth anchor your soul.

A Timeline of World History: A Biblical Perspective Based on the Ussher Chronology and Answers in Genesis

When we study history, we often turn to secular textbooks that claim the earth is billions of years old. However, as believers who hold to the authority of God's Word, we must look at history through a **biblical lens**. Archbishop James Ussher developed one of the most detailed biblical chronologies in the 17th century. Using genealogies in Scripture, Ussher calculated that **creation occurred in 4004 B.C.**, providing a framework for understanding history from a young-earth perspective.

Organizations like **Answers in Genesis** affirm this timeline, showing how historical and archaeological evidence aligns with biblical truth. According to the Ussher Chronology, let's take a journey through time, tracing world history from **creation to the present**.

Creation and the Early World (4004 B.C. – c. 2300 B.C.)

4004 B.C. – Creation of the World

"*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*." (Genesis 1:1, NASB)

- God created everything in **six literal days**, including Adam and Eve.
- The Garden of Eden was perfect, free from sin and death.

c. 3924 B.C. – The Fall of Man

- Adam and Eve disobeyed God, bringing sin into the world (Genesis 3).
- Death, suffering, and corruption entered creation.

c. 3317 B.C. – The Birth of Noah

- As humanity multiplied, wickedness increased (Genesis 6:5).
- God revealed His plan to bring judgment through a global flood.

2348 B.C. – The Global Flood

- God sent a worldwide flood to cleanse the earth (Genesis 6–9).
- Noah, his family, and the animals were saved in the ark.
- After the flood, the earth was repopulated through Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

The Ice Age (c. 2300–1600 B.C.)

c. 2300 B.C. – The Ice Age Begins

- The **Ice Age** followed the **global flood** caused by volcanic activity, warm oceans, and atmospheric changes.
- According to Answers in Genesis, the **Ice Age lasted about 700 years**, significantly shorter than secular estimates.
- The book of **Job (Job 37:9-10, Job 38:29-30)** contains references to ice and snow, suggesting people lived during this time.

Effects of the Ice Age

- Large ice sheets covered parts of **North America, Europe, and Asia**.
- Migration patterns were affected—animals and humans dispersed across the world.
- Some post-flood civilizations, such as those in Mesopotamia and Egypt, emerged during this time.

c. 1600 B.C. – The Ice Age Ends

- As the oceans cooled and volcanic activity subsided, ice sheets began to melt.
- The climate stabilized, allowing for the rise of ancient civilizations.

The Post-Flood World and the Tower of Babel (c. 2300–2000 B.C.)

c. 2242 B.C. – The Tower of Babel

- Humanity united in rebellion, building a great tower (Genesis 11).
- God confused their languages, causing them to disperse across the earth.
- This led to the formation of nations and diverse cultures.

c. 1996 B.C. – The Birth of Abraham

- God called Abraham, promising that through his descendants, all nations would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3).
- This marks the beginning of God's covenant people, Israel.

The Patriarchs and the Rise of Egypt (2000–1500 B.C.)

c. 1921 B.C. – Abraham Enters Canaan

- God reaffirmed His promise that Abraham's descendants would inherit the land.

c. 1896 B.C. – Birth of Isaac

- Isaac was the child of promise, born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age (Genesis 21).

c. 1706 B.C. – Joseph in Egypt

- Joseph was sold into slavery but rose to power in Egypt (Genesis 37–41).
- The Israelites moved to Egypt during a famine.

The Exodus and the Kingdom of Israel (1500–1000 B.C.)

1491 B.C. – The Exodus from Egypt

- God delivered Israel through Moses (Exodus 12).
- They received the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.

1451 B.C. – Entering the Promised Land

- Under Joshua's leadership, Israel conquered Canaan.

c. 1050 B.C. – The Reign of King Saul

- Israel transitioned from judges to a monarchy.

c. 1010 B.C. – King David's Reign Begins

- David established Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

c. 970 B.C. – King Solomon's Reign

- Solomon built the first temple in Jerusalem.

The Exile and Return (1000–400 B.C.)

c. 722 B.C. – The Fall of the Northern Kingdom (Israel)

- Assyria conquered Israel due to their rebellion against God.

c. 586 B.C. – The Fall of Jerusalem (Judah) and the Babylonian Exile

- Babylon destroyed the temple and took Judah captive.

c. 539 B.C. – Persia Defeats Babylon

- King Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1).

c. 516 B.C. – The Second Temple Completed

- The Jews rebuilt the temple, fulfilling prophecy.

c. 400 B.C. – The End of the Old Testament Period

- Malachi was the last prophet before a **400-year period of silence**.

The Life of Christ and the Early Church (4 B.C.–100 A.D.)

4 B.C. – The Birth of Jesus Christ

- Jesus, the promised Messiah, was born in Bethlehem (Luke 2).

30 A.D. – Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection

- Christ died for our sins and rose again, fulfilling prophecy.

33 A.D. – Pentecost and the Early Church

- The Holy Spirit empowered the apostles to spread the Gospel.

Conclusion: Why This Matters

Understanding history from a **biblical perspective** helps us:

1. **Affirm the Bible's Accuracy** – The Bible is not just a spiritual book; it is an accurate historical record.
2. **Recognize God's Sovereignty** – History unfolds according to His divine plan.
3. **Defend Our Faith** – A biblical timeline strengthens our confidence against secular claims.

The Ussher Chronology provides a framework for seeing history **God's way**, reminding us that the past, present, and future are all in His hands.

"*Forever, Lord, Your word stands in heaven*." (Psalm 119:89, NASB)

Let us trust in the **authority of Scripture** as we study the past and look forward to Christ's return!

Living with Resilient Faith in a World of Division: A Reflection on Matthew 24:1-14

As Jesus and His disciples left the temple, they marveled at its grandeur. But Jesus' response must have shocked them:

"Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down." (Matthew 24:2, NASB)

With these words, Jesus set the stage for a prophetic teaching about the **coming trials** His followers would face. In **Matthew 24:1-14**, Jesus describes wars, deception, persecution, and lawlessness. Yet His message is not one of despair but of endurance and hope.

In this passage, Jesus calls us to **look beyond the temporal**, **remain steadfast amid division**, **beware of false disciples**, **continue in love despite evil**, and **build resiliency rather than avoid trials**. Let's explore how we can apply these truths in our time.

1. Looking at the Eternal, Not the Temporal

The disciples were fixated on the temple—a magnificent structure they assumed would stand forever. But Jesus redirected their focus to **what truly lasts**.

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away." (Matthew 24:35, NASB)

Much of our struggle in this life comes from holding too tightly to **the physical, the temporary, the earthly**. We worry about our comfort, status, and security, forgetting that all of it will eventually **pass away**.

Jesus calls us to **look beyond this world**. The trials He speaks of in Matthew 24 are not signs that God has lost control but reminders that **this world is not our home**. Our hope is not in governments, wealth, or personal stability but in Christ's unshakable kingdom.

Instead of being overwhelmed by **earthly destruction**, let us fix our hearts on **eternal promises**:

- **Our inheritance is in heaven** (1 Peter 1:3-4).
- **Our true citizenship is not of this world** (Philippians 3:20).
- **We live for a kingdom that cannot be shaken** (Hebrews 12:28).

Are we clinging to things that will crumble or to Christ, who remains forever?

2. Division Will Lead to Unity Against Disciples

Jesus warned that as history unfolds, division will increase. Nations will rise against nations, people against people. Yet, ironically, **this same division will lead to unity—against His followers**.

"Then they will hand you over to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name." (Matthew 24:9, NASB)

We already see this happening. Societies that are deeply fractured and divided on many issues often find **common ground** in **opposing biblical truth**. Christian values are increasingly seen as outdated, offensive, and even dangerous.

But Jesus told us this would happen. The world rejected Him, so we should not be surprised when it rejects us (John 15:18-19). We must stand firm instead of seeking to fit in, knowing that our reward is in heaven.

3. Many of the Hardest Trials Will Come from False Disciples

One of the most **heartbreaking** realities Jesus describes is that some of the fiercest opposition will come **not from the world but from those who claim to be believers**.

"At that time, many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another." (Matthew 24:10, NASB)

Throughout history, **false disciples**—those who profess faith but abandon Christ in times of hardship—have been among the **greatest challenges to the church**. Whether through doctrinal compromise, deception, or outright betrayal, many who once seemed faithful will turn against those who remain steadfast.

Jesus warns that false teachers will rise, leading many astray (v. 11). This is why **discernment** is essential. Our faith must be built on **God's Word**, not on popular opinion, charismatic leaders, or cultural Christianity.

When betrayal and falsehood arise, we must not become cynical or bitter. Instead, we must **remain faithful to Christ, who is always true**.

4. The Multiplication of Evil Must Not Kill Our Love

Perhaps one of the most sobering warnings in Matthew 24 is this:

"And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will become cold." (Matthew 24:12, NASB)

In a world filled with hatred, it is easy to **harden our hearts**. When evil is everywhere—when morality collapses, when deception is rampant, when people betray one another—our natural tendency is to **withdraw, grow cynical, and stop loving**.

But Jesus calls us to something higher.

Love is not **conditional**—it is **commanded**. Jesus did not say, "Love others only when they deserve it." Instead, He tells us to:

- **Love our enemies** (Matthew 5:44).
- **Forgive those who hurt us** (Matthew 6:14).
- **Show kindness even when it's costly** (Luke 6:35).

As **lawlessness increases**, **our love must not decrease**. True disciples of Christ **shine brighter in the darkness, not grow cold with it**.

5. We Are to Build Resiliency, Not Avoid the Storm

In times of trial, the temptation is to **hide, compromise, or seek an easier path**. But Jesus doesn't call us to **avoid the storm**—He calls us to **endure it**.

"But the one who endures to the end is the one who will be saved." (Matthew 24:13, NASB)

The world will shake. The pressure will mount. But we are not called to **fearfully retreat**—we are called to **stand firm in Christ**.

Building resiliency means:

- **Strengthening our faith in God's Word** – Our foundation must be Scripture, not emotions or trends.
- **Practicing endurance now** – Daily obedience to Christ prepares us for greater challenges ahead.
- **Cultivating deep relationships with believers** – Isolation makes us weak; biblical community strengthens us.
- **Trusting in God's sovereignty** – Nothing happens outside His control.

Jesus didn't promise **an easy road**, but He promised **His presence** through every trial (Matthew 28:20).

Conclusion: Endure with Hope

Matthew 24:1-14 is not just a prophecy—it is a **call to resilient faith**. Jesus tells us that difficult days will come, but He also reminds us that **those who endure will be victorious**.

- Fix your eyes on the **eternal**, not the temporary.
- Stand firm even as the world unites **against disciples**.
- Be watchful, for **some of the hardest trials will come from within**.
- Let your **love grow stronger, not colder**, as evil increases.
- Build **spiritual resilience**, knowing that the storm will come—but Christ will hold you firm.

The **final promise** in this passage gives us **our mission**:

"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14, NASB)

The trials we face are not the end of the story. **God's kingdom is advancing**, and we are called to proclaim His truth **until the very end**.

So, let's stand firm. **Let's endure with hope.**

"Be strong and courageous, all of you who put your hope in the Lord." (Psalm 31:24, NASB)

Faith: Trusting God's Character When We Don't Understand His Ways

Life is full of moments that leave us bewildered—times when we face suffering, unanswered prayers, unexpected losses, or prolonged waiting. In these seasons, it is tempting to ask, *"God, what are You doing? Why is this happening?"*

Yet faith calls us to something deeper. **Faith is trusting God's character when we don't understand His ways.** This means we must **interpret our circumstances through the lens of His character** rather than **our circumstances** (or the circumstances of others).

When we reverse this truth—when we allow our experiences to define who God is—we risk distorting His goodness, questioning His love, or doubting His power. But when we begin with God's unchanging character, we can navigate even the darkest valleys with **trust, peace, and hope**.

Let's explore this powerful truth by examining three key principles:

1. God's Character Is Unchanging, Even When Life Is Unpredictable

Our circumstances are **temporary and ever-changing**. One day, we feel blessed; the next, we are overwhelmed. If we define God by our **day-to-day experiences**, we will always struggle with doubt.

But Scripture tells us that **God's character never changes**:

"For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, the sons of Jacob, have not come to an end." (Malachi 3:6, NASB)

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and forever." (Hebrews 13:8, NASB)

If God is **unchanging**, then His **goodness, love, wisdom, and sovereignty** remain constant—even when life feels chaotic.

This means:

- **When we feel abandoned, God is still faithful** (Deuteronomy 31:6).

- **When we suffer loss, God is still our provider** (Philippians 4:19).
- **When we are confused, God is still wise** (Romans 11:33).
- **When we are brokenhearted, God is still our healer** (Psalm 147:3).

No matter what we face, we can **trust who He is**, even when we do not understand what He is doing.

2. We Must Interpret Our Circumstances Through His Character, Not Vice Versa

When we experience hardship, our natural response is to **filter our view of God through our pain**. We say:

- *"If life is hard, God must not be good."*
- *"If I'm suffering, God must not love me."*
- *"If I don't see an answer, God must not be listening."*

But this is **the wrong approach**. Our circumstances **do not define God's nature—His nature defines our circumstances**.

Consider **Joseph** in the book of Genesis. His life was filled with betrayal, false accusations, imprisonment, and years of waiting. If he had judged God based on his experiences, he might have concluded that God had abandoned him.

Yet, Joseph maintained faith, trusting that **God's purposes were greater than his pain**. In the end, he could say to his brothers:

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to keep many people alive." (Genesis 50:20, NASB)

Joseph interpreted his suffering through the lens of **God's faithfulness**, not the other way around.

How Do We Apply This Today?

- Instead of saying, *"If God loved me, He would have stopped this,"* we say, *"Because God loves me, He will sustain me through this."*

- Instead of saying, *"If God were good, He would have answered my prayer by now,"* we say, *"Because God is good, His timing is perfect—even when I don't see it yet."*
- Instead of saying, *"If God was just, He wouldn't allow evil,"* we say, *"Because God is just, He will one day make all things right."*

Faith means **starting with God's character** and allowing that truth to shape how we see our trials.

3. Trusting God's Character Builds Resilient Faith

Jesus never promised an easy life. In fact, He warned us that trouble would come:

"In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33, NASB)

The difference between **a fragile faith and a resilient faith** is whether we trust **God's character** or **our changing circumstances**.

A Fragile Faith Says:

- *"God, I'll trust You as long as things go my way."*
- *"I believe in Your goodness, but only when life is smooth."*
- *"I'll follow You, but only if You give me what I want."*

A Resilient Faith Says:

- *"God, I trust You even when I don't understand."*
- *"Your goodness is not dependent on my comfort."*
- *"I will follow You no matter what because You are faithful."*

We see this kind of faith in **Job**. After losing everything—his wealth, children, and health—Job made this remarkable statement:

"Though He slays me, I will hope in Him." (Job 13:15, NASB)

Job did not understand God's ways. He had many questions. But he anchored his trust in **who God is**, not in his personal suffering.

This is the faith God calls us to—a faith that **trusts His heart, even when His hand is unclear**.

Conclusion: Holding Onto Who God Is

Faith is not about understanding every detail of God's plan—it's about **trusting His character when His ways are beyond our comprehension**.

When we face trials, we must ask:

- **Am I defining God based on my circumstances or defining my circumstances based on God's character?**
- **Am I allowing temporary pain to distort my view of an eternal God?**
- **Do I trust that even in my hardest moments, He is still good, wise, and sovereign?**

As we walk through life's uncertainties, may we stand firm in this truth:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."
(Proverbs 3:5-6, NASB)

God sees the full picture. He is always good. And even when we don't understand, we can trust Him completely.

What will you choose? Will you interpret God through your pain, or interpret your pain through God's faithfulness?

Pleasing God: A Response of Love, Not an Attempt to Earn Salvation

One of the greatest misunderstandings in the Christian life is the idea that because we are saved by grace through faith, any effort to grow, obey, or serve the Lord is somehow an attempt to "earn" our salvation. This thinking leads to a dangerous neglect of the **biblical call to live in a way that pleases God**.

The truth is, our salvation is entirely a **gift of grace** (Ephesians 2:8-9), but how we live **after** we are saved matters deeply. The Christian life is not about trying to be "good enough" for God but about responding to His love with joyful obedience.

Rather than seeing obedience as a **burden**, we should see it as an **expression of gratitude**. Seeking to please God is not an act of legalism but an act of love. As Scripture teaches, our pursuit of holiness and obedience is carried out **in the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit**—not in our own strength.

Let's explore what it means to **live in a way that pleases the Lord**, addressing some common misunderstandings along the way.

1. We Are Called to Seek What Pleases the Lord

Some might say, "*Since we are already perfect in Christ, why worry about how we live?*" But Scripture is clear: **we are called to actively seek to please God in our daily lives.**

"Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him." (2 Corinthians 5:9, NASB)

"So that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." (Colossians 1:10, NASB)

"That you excel even more" (1 Thessalonians 4:1, NASB)

These passages make it clear: **our daily actions matter to God.** While Christ's righteousness is credited to us at salvation, we are still called to **live in a way that honors Him**.

Seeking to please God is not about insecurity over our salvation but about **deepening our relationship with Him**. Just as a loving child desires to please a good parent—not to earn their love, but as a response to it—so we, as God's children, desire to please Him.

2. Faith Is the Foundation for Pleasing God

Our efforts to please God **must be rooted in faith**—not in a works-based attempt to earn His favor.

"And without faith, it is impossible to please Him, for the one who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He proves to be One who rewards those who seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6, NASB)

True obedience flows from **trust in God's character**. If we do not truly believe that He is good, loving, and wise, our attempts to obey will feel like dry religious duty rather than joyful worship.

Faith and obedience are not **opposites**—they go hand in hand. When we trust God fully, we will want to live in a way that pleases Him.

3. We Offer Ourselves as Living Sacrifices

Romans 12:1-2 beautifully expresses the **heart of Christian obedience**:

"Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." (Romans 12:1, NASB)

This verse reminds us that our efforts to please God are not about **trying to be worthy** but about **offering ourselves fully to Him in gratitude**.

This means:

- **Surrendering our will to His**
- **Living in a way that honors Him**
- **Letting His Spirit renew our minds**

We do this **not to earn salvation** but because we have already received **so great a salvation** (Hebrews 2:3).

4. We Live to Please God, Not People

A common trap is **living for the approval of others** rather than for the approval of God. Paul warns against this:

"For am I now seeking the favor of people, or of God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a bondservant of Christ." (Galatians 1:10, NASB)

When our motivation is to gain the **applause of men**, we will compromise on truth and neglect what truly pleases God. But when our hearts are set on **pleasing Him alone**, we will walk in boldness and faithfulness.

5. The Role of the Holy Spirit in Pleasing God

One of the greatest dangers in discussing **obedience and holy living** is to think that we must do this **in our own strength**. But **our efforts to please God must always be Spirit-empowered**.

"And those who are in the flesh cannot please God." (Romans 8:8, NASB)

"For it is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work for His good pleasure." (Philippians 2:13, NASB)

It is not about **striving in our flesh** but about **yielding to the Spirit**. He is the One who enables us to walk in a way that pleases the Lord.

This means:

- **We don't obey out of fear but out of love.**
- **We don't obey by sheer willpower but by His Spirit.**
- **We don't obey for acceptance but from acceptance.**

As we rely on the Spirit, our efforts to please God become a **joyful partnership with Him** rather than a crushing burden.

6. Pleasing God in Our Conduct and Obedience

Living to please God is not just about **internal faith** but about **external action**.

"Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), as you try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord." (Ephesians 5:8-10, NASB)

"Now may the God of peace… equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ." (Hebrews 13:20-21, NASB)

God calls us to **walk in obedience, not as a means of salvation but as a reflection of it**.

We are called to:

- **Pursue holiness** (1 Peter 1:15-16)
- **Bear fruit in good works** (Colossians 1:10)
- **Love and serve others** (Galatians 5:13)
- **Grow in knowledge and wisdom** (2 Peter 3:18)

These are not **burdens**—they are **blessings** that flow from a heart devoted to Christ.

Conclusion: Loving Obedience as a Response to Grace

Seeking to **please God** is not about trying to **earn** something from Him—it is about responding in **love and** gratitude for all He has done.

"We love, because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19, NASB)

When we truly grasp the **depth of His grace**, our hearts will long to **please Him—not out of duty, but out of devotion**.

So let us live each day seeking to **please our Lord—not as slaves trying to earn His favor, but as children who delight in their Father.**

Does your heart desire to please Him? If so, rejoice—because that desire itself is evidence of His Spirit at work in you!

Faith Over Fear: The Example of Caleb and Joshua: A Reflection on Numbers 13–14

Life is filled with moments where we must choose between **faith and fear**. Often, God calls us to **step forward in obedience**, but obstacles loom large, dangers feel overwhelming, and uncertainty grips our hearts.

This was precisely the situation facing Israel in **Numbers 13–14**. God had promised them a land flowing with **milk and honey**, but when the time came to enter, the people shrank back in fear—except for two men: **Caleb and Joshua**.

While ten of the twelve spies **focused on the obstacles**, Caleb and Joshua **focused on God's instructions, purposes, and power**. They believed that **God's way was always the best way**—even when it looked difficult.

Their story challenges us today: **Will we trust God and move forward in faith, or will we allow fear to hold us back.**

1. They Focused on God's Instructions Rather Than Their Own Assessments

Before Israel reached the Promised Land, **God had already given them clear instructions**:

"I am giving it to the sons of Israel." (Numbers 13:2, NASB)

The land was already **theirs, by God's promise**. Their role was simply to **trust and obey**. But when the twelve spies returned from scouting the land, ten of them focused on the **giants, fortified cities, and military strength** of the inhabitants (Numbers 13:28-29).

Instead of viewing the land through the lens of **God's promise**, they viewed it through the lens of **their own human limitations**. They saw problems instead of possibilities.

But Caleb **refused to let fear dictate his response**. Instead, he focused on **what God had already said**:

"We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will certainly prevail over it." (Numbers 13:30, NASB)

Caleb didn't deny that there were **challenges**, but he understood that **obedience is not about evaluating whether God's instructions are easy—it's about trusting that His commands are always right**.

What About Us?

How often do we hesitate to follow God because we first want to **evaluate the risks**?

- We know God calls us to **share the gospel**, but we fear rejection.
- We know He calls us to **forgive**, but we fear vulnerability.
- We know He calls us to **step out in faith**, but we fear failure.

Caleb and Joshua remind us that **God's instructions should determine our decisions, not our personal assessments**.

2. They Focused on God's Purposes Rather Than Human Fears

The ten fearful spies said:

"We are not able to go up against the people because they are too strong for us." (Numbers 13:31, NASB)

Their conclusion was based on **human strength alone**—but God had already revealed His purpose! He had **delivered them from Egypt, guided them through the wilderness, and promised them this land**.

Joshua and Caleb understood that **God's purposes always prevail**. That's why they boldly declared:

"If the Lord is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us —a land which flows with milk and honey." (Numbers 14:8, NASB)

They didn't deny the **challenges**, but they viewed them through the filter of **God's greater purpose**.

What About Us?

When God calls us to something difficult, do we ask:

- **"Is this safe?"** or **"Is this God's will?"**
- **"What if I fail?"** or **"What will God accomplish?"**

Caleb and Joshua chose to **trust God's purpose, even when it looked risky**.

3. They Focused on God's Power Rather Than Their Own Limitations

The ten spies saw **giants**. Caleb and Joshua saw **God's power**.

"Do not fear the people of the land… their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us." (Numbers 14:9, NASB)

What a powerful perspective! Caleb and Joshua were not **blind to reality**—they simply knew that **God's power was greater than any obstacle**.

The other spies focused on **what they lacked**:

"We also saw the Nephilim there… and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight." (Numbers 13:33, NASB)

This is what fear does—it **magnifies our weaknesses and shrinks our faith**. But Caleb and Joshua focused on **what God could do, not what they couldn't do**.

What About Us?

Do we hesitate to follow God because we feel **too weak, too small, or too incapable**?

Faith is not about how **strong** we are—it's about how **powerful** God is!

4. They Understood That God Uses the Very Things We Fear for Our Benefit

Perhaps the most **profound** statement from Caleb and Joshua is found in **Numbers 14:9**:

"Do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our bread." (Numbers 14:9, NASB)

What does this mean?

The very giants the people feared would actually **be to their benefit**—they would be "bread" for them! In other words, instead of **destroying them**, these challenges would **strengthen, sustain, and prepare them** for God's greater purposes.

God Uses the Things We Fear to Strengthen Us

This is a profound truth: **God often turns the very trials we fear into the tools that shape us the most.**

- **David faced Goliath**—but that victory prepared him to be king.
- **Joseph was betrayed**—but that suffering led to his exaltation in Egypt.
- **Paul was imprisoned**—but from prison, he wrote much of the New Testament.

What **giants** are you afraid of? Could it be that God intends them to be **"bread" for you**—a means of strengthening and preparing you for what's ahead?

Instead of fearing trials, we should **embrace them as opportunities for growth**.

5. They Focused on the Good That Would Come from Following God

Fear causes us to **romanticize the past and resist change**. The Israelites actually wanted to **go back to Egypt**(Numbers 14:3).

But Caleb and Joshua saw the **goodness of God's plan**. They knew that the hardships of obedience would be worth it because **God's promises never fail**.

What About Us?

Do we resist when God calls us forward because we are **more comfortable staying where we are**?

- It's easier to stay silent than to speak the truth.
- It's easier to hold onto grudges than to forgive.
- It's easier to keep our faith private than to live boldly.

But God's **best blessings** lie **on the other side of obedience**.

Conclusion: Faith Over Fear

Caleb and Joshua were outnumbered, but they were **not deterred**. They knew that **faith in God's promises is greater than the fear of obstacles**.

God calls us to **move forward in faith**—not because we understand everything, but because we **trust the One who does**.

"The Lord is with us; do not fear them." (Numbers 14:9, NASB)

What giants in your life might actually be "bread" that God is using to strengthen you?

Humility: A Willing and Eager Dependence on God

Humility is one of the most **misunderstood virtues** in the Christian life. Some see it as weakness, others as mere politeness, and still others as irrelevant in a world that prioritizes self-promotion. However, true **biblical humility** is far more than an attitude of meekness—it is a **conscious, eager, and willing dependence upon God**.

Derek Prince, in *Pride Versus Humility*, explains that **humility is not about thinking less of ourselves but about thinking more of God**. It is a daily posture of trust, surrender, and obedience, recognizing that everything we have—our abilities, opportunities, and even our very breath—comes from Him.

When we truly grasp this, we no longer view humility as a **burden** but as a **blessing**. Let's explore what this means and why humility is the key to a life that pleases God.

1. Humility Recognizes Our Dependence on God

One of the greatest deceptions of pride is the **illusion of independence**—the belief that we can make life work **without God**. This is exactly how Satan tempted Adam and Eve in the garden:

"You will be like God." (Genesis 3:5, NASB)

From the beginning, **sin has been rooted in a desire to be independent of God**, to rely on **our own wisdom rather than His**, and to seek **our own way rather than His way**. But Jesus made it clear:

"…for apart from Me you can do nothing." (John 15:5, NASB)

To be humble is to **embrace this truth joyfully**. It is to wake up each morning knowing that **we need God's guidance, strength, and wisdom** in every aspect of life. Instead of trying to control outcomes, we willingly **trust Him** with them. Instead of making decisions based solely on logic or emotions, we **seek His will first**.

Humility is not reluctance—it is **eagerness to depend on God**. It is a heart that says, *"Lord, I can't do this without You, and I don't want to."*

2. Humility is the Gateway to Grace and Strength

Many people **resist humility** because they see it as **losing power**—but the opposite is true. In God's kingdom, humility is **the key to receiving His power**.

"…God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6, NASB)

Grace is **God's empowerment**, His undeserved favor that enables us to live righteously, endure trials, and serve effectively. But God **resists the proud**—those who think they can manage life without Him.

Humility positions us **to receive from God** rather than striving in our own strength. This is why the apostle Paul could say:

"…for when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:10, NASB)

True humility says, *"Lord, I can't, but You can."* And that is exactly where God **wants us to be**.

3. Humility Follows the Example of Jesus

There is a sharp contrast between the **pride of Satan** with the **humility of Jesus**. Satan exalted himself and was **cast down** (Isaiah 14:12-15). Jesus **humbled Himself** and was **exalted** (Philippians 2:5-11).

Jesus, though **fully God**, chose the path of humility. He:

- **Emptied Himself** of His divine privileges (Philippians 2:7).
- **Became a servant** rather than seeking status.
- **Submitted** to the will of the Father—even to the point of death.

And because He humbled Himself, **God exalted Him** above every name.

"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (Matthew 23:12, NASB)

If we are to **follow Christ**, we too must embrace humility—not reluctantly, but willingly.

Humility is **not weakness**; it is the **greatest strength**, for it aligns us with **God's perfect will**.

4. Humility Frees Us from Self-Reliance

The world teaches us to be **self-sufficient**, to trust in **our own abilities**, and to chase **personal ambition**. But humility **liberates us** from the exhausting burden of self-reliance.

- Instead of **worrying** about what others think, humility **seeks to please God** (Galatians 1:10).
- Instead of striving to **control outcomes**, humility **trusts God's plan** (Proverbs 3:5-6).
- Instead of being **fearful of failure**, humility **rests in God's strength** (Isaiah 41:10).

When we humble ourselves, **we release control to God**. We stop trying to make everything work **by our own wisdom**, and we **lean fully on His sufficiency**.

Pride makes life a struggle. Humility makes life a surrender. And surrender is where **peace is found**.

5. Humility Leads to True Exaltation

Many people fear humility because they associate it with **being overlooked** or **becoming insignificant**. But in **God's kingdom, humility is the pathway to true honor**.

"Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you." (James 4:10, NASB)

The way **up is down**. Those who **exalt themselves** will be **humbled**, but those who **humble themselves** will be **lifted up**.

We don't need to **fight for recognition**, **push our own agenda**, or **demand our rights**. God sees everything, and He **rewards those who walk in humility**.

Our job is to humble ourselves. God's job is to exalt us at the right time.

Conclusion: A Willing and Eager Dependence

At its core, humility is **not reluctance**—it is **eager dependence on God**.

- It is the **joyful recognition** that we need Him in every area of life.
- It is the **freedom** of laying down our burdens and trusting Him fully.
- It is the **pathway to grace, strength, and true exaltation**.

The question we must ask is this:

Will we **cling to control**, or will we **surrender to God with willing dependence**?

The choice is ours. But the **promise remains true**:

"Whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (Matthew 23:12, NASB)

Let us then **embrace humility—not as a burden, but as a blessing**. For in humbling ourselves, we find **the grace, strength, and favor of God Himself**.

The Upside-Down Kingdom: Living by God's Eternal Reality

The Kingdom of God operates on principles that seem **upside-down** compared to the world's expectations. Jesus turns our natural inclinations on their heads—teaching us that **victory comes through surrender, strength is made perfect in weakness, and the way to live is to die.**

To follow Christ, we must **embrace the counterintuitive nature of the Kingdom** and live **not by what we see but by what is unseen**. The apostle Paul describes this reality in **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**:

"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

The guiding reality for our lives is **not what we see**—not money, power, status, or even physical health. The **unseen Kingdom of God** is what truly matters, and living accordingly requires **faith, trust, and an eternal perspective**.

1. The Paradoxes of the Kingdom

Jesus taught that God's ways are **counterintuitive** to human logic:

- **The way to be great is to serve** – *"Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant."*(Matthew 20:26)
- **The way to be strong is to be weak** – *"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."* (2 Corinthians 12:9)
- **The way to be rich is to give everything away** – *"Sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven."* (Mark 10:21)
- **The way to be wise is to become a fool** – *"God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise."* (1 Corinthians 1:27)
- **The way to be first is to be last** – *"If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."* (Mark 9:35)
- **The way to win is to lose** – *"Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."* (Matthew 16:25)

These paradoxes **challenge our instincts**. They ask us to **trust in God's ways rather than our own understanding**(Proverbs 3:5-6). The Kingdom of God requires us to **let go of worldly security and embrace faith-filled obedience.**

2. Seeing the Unseen: Examples of Kingdom Perspective

Throughout Scripture, we see that the **people of faith were those who looked beyond what was visible and embraced God's unseen reality**.

The Twelve Spies: Who Saw Correctly? (Numbers 13-14)

When Israel's spies returned from scouting the Promised Land, ten of them focused on **what they saw**:

"We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us." (Numbers 13:31)

They saw **giants, fortified cities, and overwhelming obstacles**—and their fear led to a 40-year delay in reaching the land God had already promised them.

But **Joshua and Caleb** saw something different. They saw **the unseen reality**:

"The Lord is with us; do not fear them." (Numbers 14:9)

They saw the same land, the same cities, the same giants—but they also saw **God's presence and His promise**. **Faith is not ignoring reality—it is interpreting reality through God's Word.**

Elisha's Servant: Opening His Eyes to God's Power (2 Kings 6:15-17)

When the army of Aram surrounded Elisha's city, his servant panicked. But Elisha saw **the unseen reality**:

"Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." (2 Kings 6:16)

Then he prayed for his servant's eyes to be opened, and suddenly, the young man saw **heavenly chariots of fire surrounding the enemy army**. The army of Aram looked strong—but God's protection was **stronger.**

The lesson? **Spiritual vision changes everything.** When we see **God's presence, His power, and His promises**, we will not be shaken by visible threats.

Peter Walking on Water: Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus (Matthew 14:28-31)

Peter did something **impossible**—he walked on water. But when he **looked at the waves**, fear took over, and he began to sink.

"You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:31)

His mistake? **He focused on the storm rather than Jesus.**

Faith does not deny the storm—but it **fixes its eyes on the One who is greater than the storm** (Hebrews 12:2).

3. Living in the Upside-Down Kingdom

The challenge of **Theopraxy** (living out the reality of God's Kingdom) is to **shift our focus from earthly realities to eternal ones**.

Hebrews 11: The Hall of Faith

The great heroes of the faith **lived for the unseen, eternal reality**.

"All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and welcomed them from a distance… they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one." (Hebrews 11:13,16)

They suffered **without seeing the full fulfillment of God's promises**—yet **they lived for a reality beyond this world**.

2 Corinthians 4: The Eternal Perspective

Paul, who endured **beatings, shipwrecks, imprisonments, and suffering**, still called his trials **"light and momentary afflictions"**. Why?

"For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."(2 Corinthians 4:17)

Paul knew that **what is eternal far outweighs what is temporary**. He endured suffering because he had his eyes fixed on the unseen **glory of God**.

4. How Do We Live in This Upside-Down Reality?

If we truly believe in **the unseen Kingdom**, our lives will reflect that belief. Here's what that looks like:

- **We seek first the Kingdom** (Matthew 6:33), trusting that God will provide.
- **We store up treasures in heaven** (Matthew 6:19-21) rather than obsessing over material wealth.
- **We forgive rather than seek revenge** (Luke 6:27-28).
- **We rejoice in trials**, knowing they are shaping us for eternity (James 1:2-4).
- **We serve rather than demand to be served** (Philippians 2:5-7).
- **We fix our eyes on Jesus**, running the race of faith with endurance (Hebrews 12:1-2).

This **requires discipline** (1 Corinthians 9:24-27) and **single-minded focus** (Colossians 3:1-4). It means living **for the world to come**, not just the world we see now.

Conclusion: Seeing the Unseen, Living by Faith

To live as followers of Jesus, we must **embrace the upside-down nature of the Kingdom**. What **seems foolish** to the world is actually **the wisdom of God** (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

We must make the choice:

Will we **cling to what we see**, or will we **live by faith in what is unseen**?

Will we **seek temporary security**, or will we **live for eternal reward**?

The world calls us to **self-preservation**. Jesus calls us to **self-denial**. But the reward is beyond comparison:

"Whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (Matthew 23:12)

May we live with **eyes fixed on Jesus**, fully surrendered to **His eternal Kingdom**, knowing that **God's reality is the only one that lasts.**

Glorified Through the Cross: Jesus' View of His Death

In human terms, death is often associated with **defeat, loss, and sorrow**. It is the **end** of a story, the final moment of a life. But in the Kingdom of God, things work **upside-down**—and Jesus made it clear that **His death was not a tragedy but a triumph**.

Jesus repeatedly spoke of His death not as **shameful** or **humiliating** but as **His moment of glorification**.

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." (John 12:23, NASB)

What was this **glorious hour** Jesus was referring to? **The cross.**

This is a radical perspective—one that challenges us to **see suffering, sacrifice, and obedience through the lens of eternity**. Jesus' death was not an accident; it was the **pathway to glory**, the moment in which He accomplished the greatest victory in history.

Let's explore what it means that Jesus viewed His **death as glorification** and how this truth should shape our own understanding of **suffering, obedience, and eternal reward**.

1. Jesus' Death Was His Glorification

John 12:23-24 – The Hour of Glory

As Jesus approached His crucifixion, He didn't speak of it as a **defeat**—He called it **glory**:

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:23-24, NASB)

Jesus knew that His **death was the key** to bringing life to many. Like a seed that must **die in the ground** before it can grow and multiply, Jesus' death was the moment that **His mission would bear its greatest fruit**—the salvation of countless souls.

John 17:1 – "Glorify Your Son"

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed:

"Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, so that the Son may glorify You." (John 17:1, NASB)

Jesus didn't ask to **escape** the cross. He didn't see it as a moment of **shame** but as the moment when God would **glorify Him**—because through His sacrifice, He would bring about redemption, revealing the fullness of **God's love, justice, and power**.

John 13:31-32 – Glorified Through Betrayal

Even when **Judas left to betray Him**, Jesus' response was not sorrow but **declaration of glory**:

"Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." (John 13:31, NASB)

In other words, **His betrayal, suffering, and death were not setbacks—they were part of the divine plan to glorify God.**

2. How Was Jesus' Death His Glorification?

The cross was not a moment of **defeat** but a moment of **glory** in at least four ways:

1. The Cross Displayed the Glory of God's Love

The **greatest demonstration of love** in human history was not found in Jesus' miracles but in **His sacrifice**:

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."(Romans 5:8, NASB)

Jesus' death magnified **God's love**, showing **His willingness to go to the ultimate extent to redeem humanity**.

2. The Cross Displayed the Glory of Jesus' Obedience

Jesus' **obedience to the Father** was perfect, even unto death:

"He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death: death on a cross." (Philippians 2:8, NASB)

His death was **not weakness**—it was **the ultimate act of submission to God's will**, fulfilling the divine purpose set before Him.

3. The Cross Displayed the Glory of Jesus' Victory

The cross wasn't just an **act of sacrifice**—it was a **conquest**. Through His death, Jesus:

- **Defeated Satan** (Colossians 2:15)
- **Broke the power of sin** (Romans 6:10-11)
- **Overcame death itself** (1 Corinthians 15:54-57)

His suffering **wasn't the end**—it was the **means** through which He secured **eternal triumph**.

4. The Cross Displayed the Glory of God's Plan of Redemption

From a human standpoint, Jesus' death seemed **like a failure**—but in reality, it was **the greatest fulfillment of prophecy and God's redemptive plan**.

What seemed like **defeat** was actually **the climax of God's victory**:

"For this reason, God also highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name." (Philippians 2:9, NASB)

Because of the **humiliation of the cross**, Jesus was **exalted above all things**.

3. What This Means for Us

Jesus' perspective on **glory through suffering** is not just about **His own death**—it teaches us **how to view our own lives and struggles**.

1. Our Suffering Has Purpose

Like Jesus, we will also **face trials**. But when we suffer **for Christ**, we are not **losing**—we are **sharing in His glory**:

"If we endure, we will also reign with Him." (2 Timothy 2:12, NASB)

The world sees **sacrifice for God as loss**—but in the Kingdom, **suffering for Jesus produces eternal reward**.

2. Our Obedience, Even When Costly, Glorifies God

Following Jesus will **cost us something**—but in that cost, we **glorify Him**:

"Whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." (Matthew 16:25, NASB)

Jesus didn't see **obedience as a restriction** but as the **pathway to glory**. We, too, must see **our sacrifices as part of our eternal calling**.

3. We Are Called to Take Up Our Cross

Jesus invites us to follow **His path**:

"If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me." (Matthew 16:24, NASB)

Our lives **aren't about self-exaltation**. We are called to **humble ourselves**, knowing that in God's Kingdom, **the way up is down**.

"Whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (Matthew 23:12, NASB)

Conclusion: The Glory of the Cross

Jesus saw **His death not as a defeat but as the pathway to glory**. Through the **cross**, He displayed the **greatest love**, achieved **the greatest victory**, and fulfilled **God's eternal plan**.

This truth challenges us:

- Will we **embrace suffering for Christ** as part of our **glorification**?
- Will we **trust that obedience leads to eternal reward**?

- Will we **see the unseen**, recognizing that **true victory comes through surrender**?

Jesus has shown us the way. Now, it is our turn to **take up our cross, follow Him, and trust that there is eternal glory in every sacrifice.**

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." (John 12:23, NASB)

May we, too, glorify God in every step of obedience and sacrifice for His sake.

The Purpose of Suffering: God's Refining Fire

Suffering is a reality that no one escapes. It comes in many forms—persecution, loss, hardship, trials—but as followers of Christ, we are called to **see suffering differently**. Instead of viewing it as meaningless pain, we are to recognize suffering as **a tool in God's hands**, shaping us, strengthening us, and drawing us closer to Him.

The Bible is filled with examples of men and women who endured suffering yet found **purpose, growth, and even joy in their trials**. It highlights the **importance of suffering in the Christian walk**—not as punishment but as a means of refining us for God's glory.

If we respond well, our suffering will **not be wasted**. Instead, it will be **a means of transformation, a testimony to others, and a source of eternal reward**. Let's explore **how God uses suffering for His purposes** and how we are called to respond.

1. Suffering as a Mark of Genuine Faith

Many Christians are familiar with the **promises of God**, but few consider this one their favorite:

"Indeed, all who want to live in a godly way in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Timothy 3:12, NASB)

The reality of persecution is not **an unfortunate possibility**—it is **a certainty** for those who truly follow Christ. Why? Because **when we live for God's Kingdom, we will inevitably come into conflict with the kingdom of darkness**.

If our lives are **too easy**, it may be a sign that we are not posing a real threat to the enemy. Suffering, in many ways, is **evidence that we are on the right path**.

"We are targets. The enemy has a purpose for these attacks, and it is to silence us. The Lord also has purposes, holy purposes."

How Should We Respond?

When suffering comes, our natural instinct is to **avoid it, complain, or seek relief as quickly as possible**. But the Bible teaches us to **rejoice** instead:

"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."(Matthew 5:10, NASB)

Rather than seeing suffering as **God's absence**, we should see it as **proof of His presence and work in our lives**.

2. Suffering as a Refining Process

God does not allow suffering **without purpose**. Every trial we endure is meant to **refine us, purify us, and prepare us for greater things**.

This truth is powerfully illustrated in the story of **Joseph**. Betrayed by his own brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused, and imprisoned—his life was filled with injustice and hardship. Yet, years later, when he stood in a position of power in Egypt, he told his brothers:

"It was not you who sent me here, but God." (Genesis 45:8, NASB)

Joseph understood that **even the most painful events of his life were part of God's divine plan**. His suffering was not wasted—it was the means through which God prepared him to **save an entire nation from famine**.

The **same is true for us**. Suffering refines our character, deepens our dependence on God, and strengthens our faith. As the Psalmist declares:

"For You, God, tested us; You refined us like silver." (Psalm 66:10, NASB)

Refining requires fire. Growth requires trials. Faith is tested in suffering.

How Should We Respond?

Instead of asking, **"Why is this happening to me?"** we should ask:

- "*What is God teaching me through this?*"
- "*How can this suffering bring glory to God?*"

- *"How can I trust Him more in this trial?"*

When we shift our focus from **self-pity to divine purpose**, suffering becomes **a tool for transformation**.

3. Suffering as a Means of Spiritual Growth

Many Christians assume that **spiritual growth comes primarily through reading Scripture, prayer, and fellowship**. While these are **vital**, **Scripture speaks even more about how we grow through suffering**.

Trials force us to **depend on God**, to **die to ourselves**, and to **walk by faith rather than sight**. As Paul writes:

"We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." (Romans 5:3-4, NASB)

The Example of Job

Few in history suffered as deeply as **Job**. He lost **everything**—his family, his wealth, his health—yet in the end, he **encountered God in a deeper way than ever before**. Job's story reminds us that suffering can lead to **intimacy with God**, something **far greater than any earthly comfort**.

"I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You." (Job 42:5, NASB)

Our trials are **invitations to know God more deeply**.

How Should We Respond?

- **Persevere with faith** (*"Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown."* Revelation 2:10, NASB)
- **Keep an eternal perspective** (*"For our momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."* 2 Corinthians 4:17, NASB)

- **Embrace suffering as a tool of refinement** (*"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds."* James 1:2, NASB)

4. Suffering as a Testimony to Others

One of the **greatest witnesses to the power of the gospel** is the way believers **endure suffering with faith and joy**.

The early Christians in the **book of Acts** were repeatedly **beaten, imprisoned, and persecuted**—yet they did not shrink back. Instead:

"The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name." (Acts 5:41, NASB)

The way we respond to suffering **impacts those around us**. Our faithfulness in trials **encourages other believers** and **testifies to unbelievers that Christ is worth it**.

5. The Eternal Perspective on Suffering

In the end, **every tear will be wiped away**. Every trial will be replaced with **joy in God's presence**. The suffering of this world is **temporary**, but the reward is **eternal**:

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain." (Revelation 21:4, NASB)

This is why Paul could call **beatings, shipwrecks, and imprisonments "light and momentary afflictions"**—because he saw **the eternal weight of glory** that was coming.

"If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him." (2 Timothy 2:11-12, NASB)

We are **not suffering in vain**—we are being prepared for an eternity with **Christ in glory**.

Conclusion: Suffering is a Gift

Suffering, when viewed from **God's perspective**, is not **a curse** but **a blessing**. It:

- **Strengthens our faith**
- **Draws us closer to God**
- **Shapes our character**
- **Testifies to others**
- **Prepares us for eternal glory**

So when trials come, let us not shrink back. **Let us embrace suffering as a means of growth, glorification, and testimony.**

For in **God's Kingdom**, suffering is never wasted—it is the **pathway to glory.**

"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great." (Matthew 5:12, NASB)

The Mercy of Hardship: How Suffering Draws People to God

Hardship, suffering, and desperation are realities that no one naturally desires. In fact, many people view suffering as proof that God is either absent or unloving. However, when we look through **the lens of Scripture**, we see that **suffering can be one of God's greatest mercies for those who do not yet know Him**.

The truth is that people rarely turn to God when they are comfortable, secure, and self-sufficient. **When everything seems to be going well, there is little reason to seek Him.** It is often in **desperation and brokenness** that people finally recognize their need for God.

Throughout the Bible, we see this pattern repeatedly—God allows **trouble, suffering, and hardship** to call people to repentance, faith, and salvation. If suffering **awakens someone to their need for God**, then it is **not cruelty—it is mercy.**

1. The Danger of Comfort: Why People Reject God in Security

Jesus Himself warned about **the spiritual danger of comfort and security**. When people feel self-sufficient, they often do not see their need for Him.

"Truly I say to you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 19:23, NASB)

Jesus said it was **hard** for the rich to enter the Kingdom—not because wealth is inherently evil, but because wealth often creates a false sense of **self-sufficiency**. When people are **comfortable and prosperous**, they tend to trust in **themselves** rather than in God.

This is why **many who have everything in this world have little interest in the things of eternity**.

"You say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have no need of anything,' and yet you do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." (Revelation 3:17, NASB)

When people believe they are **in control of their lives**, they **do not see their true spiritual condition**. This is why God, in His mercy, often allows suffering—to shake people out of **complacency** and open their eyes to **their true needs**.

2. How God Uses Hardship to Bring People to Him

a) The Prodigal Son: Desperation Leads to Repentance

One of the most **powerful illustrations** of how suffering leads to salvation is **the story of the Prodigal Son** in Luke 15.

- The son demanded his inheritance, left his father's house, and **spent everything on reckless living**.
- **At first, life seemed great**—he had money, friends, and freedom.
- But then, **a famine came**, and he was left with **nothing**.

It was only **when he was starving, humiliated, and desperate** that he finally realized the truth:

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired laborers have more than enough bread, but I am dying here from hunger!'" (Luke 15:17, NASB)

The **suffering was the turning point**. Without it, the prodigal son would have **never returned home**. His desperation was **God's mercy**, driving him back to his father's love.

b) Israel's Suffering in Judges: Hardship Leads to Seeking God

The book of **Judges** follows a repeated pattern:

1. **Israel forgets God** and follows idols.
2. God allows them to **suffer oppression** from their enemies.
3. **In their distress, they cry out to God.**
4. God sends a **deliverer** to rescue them.

One example is **Judges 3:7-9**:

"The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord... So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of Cushan-

rishathaim… And the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord, and the Lord raised up a deliverer."

When Israel was **comfortable, they forgot God**. But in suffering, **they remembered Him and turned back**.

God's goal was **not punishment** but **repentance**. Their suffering was **a wake-up call**, an act of mercy to turn them back to **true life in Him**.

c) Nebuchadnezzar: Humbling the Proud to Save Them

Nebuchadnezzar, the great king of Babylon, was full of **pride and self-sufficiency**. He **refused to acknowledge God**—until God **humbled him**:

"The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built… by my might and for the honor of my majesty?'" (Daniel 4:30, NASB)

Because of his arrogance, God **took everything from him**:

- He lost his kingdom.
- He lost his sanity.
- He lived like an animal.

Only **after seven years of suffering** did Nebuchadnezzar finally **recognize the truth**:

"At the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High." (Daniel 4:34, NASB)

God could have **left Nebuchadnezzar in his pride**—but in **His mercy, He humbled him** so that he could be **saved**.

3. The Danger of Ignoring God's Warnings

Suffering **softens some hearts**—but others **harden their hearts even more**.

"In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other." (Ecclesiastes 7:14, NASB)

Hardship is **God's invitation** to turn to Him. But if people **reject His warnings**, they may face something far worse—**eternal separation from God**.

In **Revelation 16**, during the final judgments, people experience **unimaginable suffering**—but instead of repenting, they **curse God**:

"And they blasphemed the name of God… and they did not repent." (Revelation 16:9, NASB)

Suffering **is meant to bring people to repentance**—but those who **harden their hearts** will face even greater loss.

4. How Should We Respond to the Suffering of Others?

If suffering can lead people to God, **how should we, as Christians, respond to those who are going through hardship?**

a) Pray for Open Eyes

- Ask God to **soften their hearts** and **help them see their need for Him**.
- **Do not simply pray for suffering to end—pray that it leads them to Christ.**

b) Offer the Hope of the Gospel

- Instead of just offering **temporary relief**, point them to the **eternal hope of Jesus**.
- Remind them that **God has a purpose in their pain**.

c) Be Ready to Share Your Own Story

- Many of us **came to Christ through hardship**—share your testimony!
- Show how **God used suffering for good in your life.**

Conclusion: Suffering is God's Mercy

If people never suffered, **many would never seek God**. They would live their whole lives in **self-sufficiency and pride**, only to face **eternal separation from Him**.

But **God, in His mercy, allows hardship**—not to destroy, but to **save**.

- The **Prodigal Son** returned home **because he was desperate**.
- **Israel** turned back to God **only after suffering oppression**.

- **Nebuchadnezzar** humbled himself **only after God stripped him of everything**.

For those who do not know God, suffering is **a gift of grace**—because **it might be the only thing that awakens them to their need for Him**.

Let us pray that **every hardship leads people not to bitterness but to the Savior who longs to redeem them.**

"Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep Your word." (Psalm 119:67, NASB)

Do You See Clearly? The Incomplete View of Jesus in Today's World

Many people today—including some in the church—have **an incomplete view of Jesus**. They know something about Him, but they don't fully grasp **who He is**, what He has done, or what He demands of His followers.

This isn't a new problem. Even when Jesus walked the earth, those closest to Him often misunderstood Him. **The disciples struggled to truly comprehend His identity** until after His resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

One passage that illustrates this partial understanding is the **two-stage healing of the blind man in Bethsaida** (Mark 8:22–26). Unlike Jesus' other miracles, this one was **not instantaneous**—the blind man was only **partially healed at first**, seeing people "like trees, walking around." Only after Jesus touched him again did he see **clearly**.

What was the point of this unique miracle? More than just physical healing, **it was a living parable of spiritual blindness and growth**—a truth that applies to many in our world today.

1. Partial Sight: A Common Problem in the Church Today

Many people **recognize Jesus** but do not **fully understand Him**. They may acknowledge that He is loving, that He performed miracles, or that He taught great moral truths. But their view of Him is **blurred**, like the blind man's first sight.

Just as the disciples had **partial sight** before the resurrection, many today hold onto **a comfortable, incomplete version of Jesus**.

Some see Jesus only as…

- **A Moral Teacher** – They admire His wisdom but ignore His divinity.
- **A Social Revolutionary** – They emphasize His concern for justice but neglect His call to holiness and repentance.
- **A Cosmic Cheerleader** – They believe He exists to make them happy but overlook His demand for sacrifice and obedience.

- **A Symbol of Tradition** – They attend church and participate in religious activities but have no personal relationship with Him.

The Disciples Had the Same Problem

Before Jesus' death and resurrection, the disciples had **only a partial understanding** of who He was. They saw Him as **the Messiah**, but they misunderstood **what that meant**.

- They expected Him to **overthrow Rome**, not to die on a cross.
- They argued over **who would be the greatest** rather than understanding the call to servanthood.
- They ran in fear when He was arrested rather than trusting in His power.

Like the blind man in Bethsaida, **they saw, but not clearly**.

2. The Need for a Second Touch: Spiritual Growth and Full Sight

Just as Jesus **touched the blind man a second time**, He also **"touched" the disciples a second time**—through His resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit. That was when they **finally understood**.

"Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." (Luke 24:45, NASB)

Before that moment, their faith was **weak and uncertain**. Afterward, they boldly proclaimed **the full truth of who Jesus was**—even in the face of persecution.

The same is true for us today. Many people **need a second touch from Jesus** to move from partial understanding to **full clarity**.

How Does This Happen?

- **Through the Word of God** – The more we study Scripture, the clearer our vision of Jesus becomes. *(Romans 10:17)*

- **Through the Holy Spirit** – Only **God can open our spiritual eyes**. *(John 16:13)*

- **Through Surrender and Obedience** – As we yield to Christ, we begin to see Him as **Lord and King, not just a teacher or helper**. *(Matthew 16:24-25)*

- **Through Suffering and Trials** – Hardship often strips away **false views of Jesus** and reveals His true power. *(2 Corinthians 12:9)*

If you are struggling with **doubt, confusion, or a limited view of Jesus**, **ask Him to touch you again**—to reveal Himself **fully and powerfully**.

3. The Danger of a Blurred Vision of Christ

Having a **partial view of Jesus is dangerous**. It leads to **weak faith, compromised beliefs, and spiritual stagnation**.

- **A Partial Jesus Leads to a Shallow Faith** – Many fall away in times of suffering because they never knew **the Jesus who calls us to take up our cross** (Matthew 10:38).
- **A Partial Jesus Creates False Expectations** – Some believe Jesus exists to **make them comfortable**, and they become bitter when life is hard (John 16:33).
- **A Partial Jesus Leads to Spiritual Blindness**. Just as the Pharisees rejected Jesus because He didn't fit their expectations, **many today reject the real Jesus** because they prefer a **Jesus of their own making** (John 5:39-40).

Jesus warned about this:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 7:21, NASB)

We must **seek to know Him fully**, not just the **parts of Him that are comfortable or appealing**.

4. Seeing Clearly: Who is Jesus Really?

When we allow Jesus to **remove our spiritual blindness**, we begin to see Him **as He truly is**:

- **He is Savior** – The only way to God (John 14:6).
- **He is Lord** – The rightful King who demands our full allegiance (Philippians 2:9-11).

- **He is Judge** – The One before whom every knee will bow (Revelation 19:11-16).
- **He is the Suffering Servant** – The Lamb who was slain for our sins (Isaiah 53:5).
- **He is the Conquering King** – The One who will return in power and glory (Revelation 1:7).

Do you see Jesus clearly? Or are you still seeing "trees walking around"?

If your view of Him is **blurred, incomplete, or distorted**, pray that He would **open your eyes fully**—so that you may **know Him, follow Him, and worship Him as He truly is.**

Conclusion: Ask for the Second Touch

Like the blind man in Bethsaida, many today have **only a partial understanding of Jesus**. Some have **never known Him truly**, while others have allowed **culture, comfort, or false teachings to distort their vision**.

But here is the **good news**:

- **Jesus is willing to touch us again.**
- **Jesus wants us to see Him clearly.**
- **Jesus is ready to open our eyes fully.**

If you find yourself struggling to understand Jesus, or if your faith feels **weak and uncertain**, ask Him:

"*Lord, touch me again. Open my eyes. Help me to see You as You truly are.*"

When Jesus **heals our spiritual blindness**, we don't just see a great teacher—we see **the Lord of all creation, the Lamb of God, and the Savior of our souls.**

And when we truly see Him, **everything changes**.

"Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face." (1 Corinthians 13:12, NASB)

Let us seek the second touch of Jesus—so that we may see clearly and know Him fully.

Faith, Adaptability, and Resilience in a VUCA World

We live in a world defined by **VUCA—volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity**. Nations are in turmoil, economies fluctuate, technology rapidly evolves, and cultural values shift. In such an environment, many feel **overwhelmed, anxious, and unsure of what the future holds**.

But as followers of Christ, we are **not called to fear—we are called to adapt, endure, and remain steadfast in faith**. The Bible is filled with examples of **resilient believers who navigated uncertainty by trusting in God and adjusting to new realities**.

How can we, as Christians, cultivate **adaptability and resilience** in this **unpredictable world**? Let's explore how **biblical principles prepare us to thrive in times of VUCA.**

1. The Biblical Call to Resilience

Resilience is **the ability to withstand hardship, recover from trials, and continue forward in faith**. Scripture consistently portrays **resilient individuals** who faced uncertainty but remained steadfast in their mission.

a) Joseph: A Life of Unexpected Changes

Joseph's life was marked by extreme **volatility and uncertainty**:

- **He was betrayed** by his brothers and sold into slavery (Genesis 37).
- **He was falsely accused** and thrown into prison (Genesis 39).
- **He was forgotten** by those he helped (Genesis 40).
- **He was suddenly promoted** to second-in-command of Egypt (Genesis 41).

Joseph's **resilience** was rooted in his **faith in God**. He adapted to each hardship, refusing to become bitter or hopeless. Instead, he **continued to trust in God's purpose**:

"You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." (Genesis 50:20, NASB)

Joseph's ability to **adjust, endure, and remain faithful** positioned him to be a **leader in uncertain times**.

b) Paul: Thriving Amid Hardship

Paul experienced constant **complexity and ambiguity** in his ministry:

- **Imprisoned multiple times** (Philippians 1:12-14).
- **Beaten and persecuted** (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).
- **Shipwrecked and in danger** (Acts 27).
- **Faced changing circumstances in every city he visited**.

Yet, Paul **never gave up**. His adaptability allowed him to **preach the gospel despite hardship**. He wrote:

"I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am." (Philippians 4:11, NASB)

This is **true resilience**—not simply surviving difficulty but **flourishing through faith in Christ**.

2. The Biblical Call to Adaptability

Adaptability is **the ability to adjust to new conditions without compromising faith**. It requires us to be **flexible, willing to change, and open to God's leading**—just as biblical heroes had to **pivot in response to new challenges**.

a) The Early Church: Adjusting to Persecution

The early church **thrived under intense pressure**. Jesus told His disciples to take the gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), but they initially stayed in Jerusalem.

God allowed **persecution to scatter them** (Acts 8:1-4), which actually **accelerated the spread of the gospel**. Instead of seeing persecution as a defeat, the believers **adapted**:

- **Philip preached in Samaria** (Acts 8:5-8).
- **Paul and Barnabas took missionary journeys** (Acts 13-14).
- **Gentiles were welcomed into the faith** (Acts 10, Acts 15).

Rather than resisting change, the early church **embraced it as part of God's plan**.

b) Jesus: The Ultimate Example of Adaptability

Jesus **never changed His mission**, but He adapted His **methods** based on His audience:

- He taught **farmers using parables of seeds** (Mark 4).
- He spoke to **Pharisees using Scripture** (Matthew 22).
- He engaged **sinners with love and grace** (John 8).
- He ministered to **Gentiles as well as Jews** (Matthew 15:21-28).

Jesus showed us that **adaptability is not compromise**—it is **wisdom**.

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be as wary as serpents, and as innocent as doves." (Matthew 10:16, NASB)

The key is to **adapt without losing our foundation in Christ**.

3. How We Can Cultivate Adaptability and Resilience Today

In a world filled with **volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity**, we must develop **strong faith, flexible thinking, and a willingness to trust God fully**.

a) Keep Your Faith Rooted in the Unchanging God

Though the world shifts, **God remains constant**:

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and forever." (Hebrews 13:8, NASB)

A resilient person is **not one who never struggles** but one who **returns to God's promises** even in uncertainty.

b) Be Willing to Learn and Grow

Solomon tells us:

"The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness." (Proverbs 15:14, NASB)

A rigid mindset **will not survive in a changing world**. We must be willing to **learn new things, seek wisdom, and grow spiritually**.

c) Trust God's Sovereignty Over Chaos

We may not always understand **why things happen**, but we trust that God is in control:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. (Isaiah 55:8, NASB)

Resilient believers **trust in God's bigger plan**, even when they cannot see the full picture.

d) Take Action Despite Uncertainty

Too many people wait for **perfect clarity before acting**. But faith requires **moving forward in trust**:

"We walk by faith, not by sight." (2 Corinthians 5:7, NASB)

Rather than fearing the unknown, we should **step out boldly** as God leads.

e) Surround Yourself with a Strong Community

The early church **did not survive persecution alone**—they relied on **one another** for strength and encouragement.

"Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2, NASB)

We need **fellow believers** to help us navigate uncertain times with wisdom and faith.

Conclusion: Faith That Stands in a Changing World

As the world continues to be marked by **volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity**, we must:

- **Remain deeply rooted in God's unchanging truth**
- **Embrace adaptability as a necessary part of following Christ**

- **Cultivate resilience through faith, prayer, and community**
- **Trust God's sovereignty over every challenge we face**

Jesus never promised a life of **predictability or ease**, but He did promise **His presence, His guidance, and His victory**.

"In this world, you will have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33, NASB)

Our hope is **not in stability but in the One who never changes**.

So when **uncertainty shakes the world**, let's stand firm in faith—**resilient, adaptable, and unwavering in our trust in God.**

The Right Response to God's Word

Imagine sitting in a grand concert hall, listening to a world-class musician perform a breathtaking piece. The music moves you deeply, stirring your emotions, and for a moment, you are completely captivated. But then the music stops, and you walk away, unchanged. You never pick up an instrument, never attempt to learn the piece, and never let the experience shape you beyond that moment.

This is what happens when we hear God's Word but fail to respond to it.

Ezekiel 33:30-33 paints a sobering picture of this kind of response. God tells the prophet Ezekiel that the people of Israel love to listen to him, but they treat his words like entertainment. They gather to hear his messages, speaking of them as though they are beautiful and inspiring, but they never put them into practice:

"So they come to you as people do, and sit before you as My people, and hear your words, but they do not do them; for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouths, and their hearts go after their own advantage. And behold, you are to them like a love song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words but do not practice them. So when it comes—as it certainly will—then they will know that a prophet has been among them." (Ezekiel 33:31-33, NASB)

These people enjoyed hearing the truth, but they never let it transform their lives. They treated God's Word like a performance—something to admire, but not something to live by.

James 1:22-25 gives us a powerful contrast:

"But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not just hearers who deceive themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who has looked intently at the perfect law, the law of freedom, and has continued in it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an active doer, this person will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:22-25, NASB)

James compares God's Word to a mirror. A mirror reveals reality—it shows us what we truly look like. But a mirror is only useful if we respond to what we see. If you look in a mirror and notice your hair is a mess or your face is dirty, but you walk away without doing anything about it, the mirror has done you no good.

Likewise, if we hear God's truth but do nothing with it, we deceive ourselves. We might think we're being spiritual simply because we read the Bible or listen to a sermon, but if we don't allow God's Word to change us, we are just hearers, not doers.

How Do We Become Doers of the Word?

It is not enough to have good intentions. It's not enough to agree that God's Word is true or to feel inspired when we hear it. We must develop consistent habits that ensure we respond to God's truth in real and practical ways.

Here are a few ways to establish this pattern in our lives:

1. Approach God's Word with Intentionality

James tells us that the one who is blessed is the one who *looks intently* at God's law. This is not a casual glance but a deep, searching look. When we read Scripture or hear a sermon, we should not rush through it or treat it as background noise. Instead, we must slow down, meditate on what we're reading, and ask how it applies to our lives.

One way to do this is through journaling. Writing down key verses, insights, and specific applications helps us absorb and act on what we learn. The journal entries need to be revisited regularly by us and with others who can hold us accountable for what we heard and how we have responded to it.

2. Make Obedience a Daily Practice

The key difference between the hearer and the doer is that the doer *continues* in the Word. This means obedience is not occasional but a way of life.

Jesus said in John 14:15, *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."* True love for God is revealed in our obedience. When we recognize an area where our life does not align with Scripture, we must take intentional steps to change.

For example, if the Bible convicts us about how we use our words, we might establish a habit of pausing before speaking, praying for wisdom, and intentionally using words to encourage rather than to criticize. It also means that establishing patterns for hearing from God must be established into consistent habits.

3. Seek Accountability

One of the best ways to ensure we apply God's Word is to invite others into the process. Find a trusted friend, mentor, or small group who will challenge and encourage you to live out what you are learning. When we know that someone will ask us how we are responding to God's Word, we are far more likely to take action.

4. Pray for the Strength to Obey

We cannot do this on our own. It is God who gives us the power to live according to His Word. Philippians 2:13 reminds us, *"For it is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work for His good pleasure."*

If we struggle to apply what we learn, we should ask God for His help. He is faithful to provide the strength and wisdom we need to walk in obedience. Being empowered by the Holy Spirit and walking in His filling is the only way to do so.

A Call to Action

Hearing God's Word is not the end goal—it is only the beginning. The real question is: **How will we respond?** Will we be like the people in Ezekiel's time, who enjoyed hearing but never changed? Or will we be like the wise person James describes, who looks intently into the Word and then acts upon it?

Over the next several blog entries, we will explore specific patterns, tools, and habits we can use to apply this principle in different areas of life. From our relationships to our daily habits, we will look at how to establish patterns of hearing and responding to God's truth in a way that leads to real transformation.

May we be not just hearers, but doers of the Word!

The 3/3 Pattern: Living a Life of Accountability and Growth

Every follower of Jesus is called not only to hear God's Word but to live it out and share it with others. Yet, without an intentional pattern of reflection, obedience, and sharing, we can easily slip into a passive faith—one where we consume spiritual truth but fail to apply it.

This is where the **3/3 (Three-Thirds) pattern** becomes invaluable. It is a simple but powerful framework for **accountability** in our walk with Christ. The three-thirds pattern involves:

1. **Looking Back** – Reviewing how we've lived out what we previously heard from God.
2. **Looking Up** – Seeking fresh guidance from God through His Word, prayer, His people, and His works.
3. **Looking Forward** – Committing to specific, intentional obedience and sharing with others.

This process is essential for growing as disciples and making disciples. It develops a rhythm of continual transformation, ensuring that what we hear from God is not just a passing thought but something that changes us and impacts those around us.

Looking Back: How Have I Responded?

The first step is to **look back** and assess our response to what we previously heard from God. This is where accountability begins.

We ask ourselves:

- Did I apply what God showed me last time?
- Did I take action on what I committed to do?
- Did I share with the person I intended to share with?

This step is most effective when we **write down** what we hear from God and how we plan to obey. If we don't document it, we are far more likely to forget it. Writing creates clarity and commitment.

Application should cover **both personal obedience and outward sharing**:

- **Personal implementation** – What changes did I make in my own life based on what God revealed to me?
- **Sharing with others** – Did I communicate these truths to someone else? Who did I tell, and how did they respond?

Without accountability, we risk treating God's Word as mere information rather than life-changing truth. Looking back ensures that we are not just hearers but doers of the Word.

Looking Up: Hearing Freshly from God

After reviewing our past obedience, we **look up** to hear from God again. This is how we receive fresh insight, direction, and strength. In the Kingdom of God, this is our **spiritual inhaling**—breathing in what God is revealing to us.

God speaks through multiple channels, and we must be attentive to all of them:

We Breathe IN When We Hear From God Through:

1. **HIS WORD** – The Bible is our primary source of truth. Every time we engage with Scripture, we should read it with an open heart, and seek guidance from the Lord regarding how we should apply it and whom we should share it with.
2. **PRAYER** – Through conversation with God, we gain clarity, receive wisdom, and align our hearts with His will. This is true in times of specific, focused prayer and in a lifestyle of awareness of His presence and being in constant conversation with Him in our minds.
3. **HIS BODY** – The church, the people of God, speak into our lives. God uses brothers and sisters in Christ to challenge, encourage, and confirm His direction.
4. **HIS WORKS** – Our life experiences, circumstances, and even challenges (including suffering) can be God's way of speaking to us and shaping us.

Jesus promised that those who truly seek Him will find Him (Matthew 7:7). When we breathe in—when we seek, listen, and receive—we position ourselves to hear God's voice clearly.

Looking Forward: How Will I Respond?

Once we've reflected on our past response and received fresh insight from God, we **look forward** with intentionality. This is where we commit to action.

This is our **spiritual exhaling**—we breathe out when we **obey and share** what God has spoken.

We Breathe OUT When We OBEY

Obedience is the natural response of a true disciple. Jesus said, *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."*(John 14:15, NASB)

Obedience can take many forms:

- Changing our thoughts, attitudes, or actions to align with God's truth.
- Letting go of sin or unhealthy habits.
- Extending forgiveness or love to someone who is difficult to live with.
- Taking steps of faith, even when it feels uncomfortable.
-

We Breathe OUT When We SHARE

The truth God gives us is not meant to be hoarded—it is meant to be shared. Jesus commanded His followers to **go and make disciples** (Matthew 28:19-20). This means we should always be thinking about:

- **Who can I share this with?**
- **When will I do it?**
- **How will I communicate it?**

Whether it's sharing with a friend, leading a small group, or simply having a conversation with a coworker or family member, every believer is called to pass on what they receive from God.

Spiritual Breathing: A Critical Pattern for Life

The **3/3 pattern is more than a strategy—it's a way of life**. It mirrors the natural rhythm of **spiritual breathing**:

- **We inhale when we hear from God** – through His Word, prayer, His people, and His works.
- **We exhale when we respond** – through obedience and sharing with others.

A healthy disciple breathes in and breathes out continuously. If we only breathe in (consume without applying), we become spiritually stagnant. If we only breathe out (try to obey and share without hearing from God), we become exhausted. Both are necessary for a thriving spiritual life.

Practicing the 3/3 Pattern Personally and Corporately

This process should be practiced both individually and in community.

Individually:

- Set aside time regularly to **look back, look up, and look forward**.
- Keep a journal of what God is teaching you and how you are applying it.
- Be intentional about sharing with others what you learn. This includes sharing with a personal accountability partner on a regular basis.

In Community:

- Practice this in **small groups, discipleship meetings, or accountability relationships**.
- Encourage one another in obedience and hold each other accountable for sharing.
- Implement this corporately in your church or ministry settings to align your community with God's Word.

The Reward of a Life Lived in Obedience

When we live according to the 3/3 pattern, we create a **lifestyle of faithfulness**. The more we listen and obey, the clearer God's voice becomes. Jesus said,

"For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him." (Matthew 13:12, NASB)

When we are faithful with what God gives us, He entrusts us with more. This means the more we hear, obey, and share, the deeper our relationship with Him grows.

A Challenge to Take Action

How are you doing with spiritual breathing? Are you consistently inhaling God's truth and exhaling through obedience and sharing?

This process is not just a suggestion—it is **critical** for every follower of Jesus. In the coming blog entries, we will explore **specific ways to apply this pattern** in different areas of life. From personal spiritual disciplines to corporate discipleship, we will look at how we can faithfully practice hearing, obeying, and sharing.

Let's commit together to **not just be hearers, but doers of the Word**. Let's breathe in, breathe out, and live fully in the life God has called us to!

Incorporating the 3/3 Pattern for Processing Scripture in Small Groups: A Practical Guide

Small groups play a vital role in believers' spiritual growth. They create a setting where we can support each other, study God's Word together, and hold one another accountable. But without an intentional structure, small groups can easily drift into mere social gatherings or discussions that lack real-life application.

This is where the **3/3 pattern** becomes a game-changer. It provides a **balanced and effective way** for small groups to study Scripture, encourage accountability, and equip believers to live out their faith actively. By structuring our time into three equal parts—**Look Back, Look Up, and Look Forward**—we ensure that each meeting fosters spiritual growth, obedience, and multiplication.

LOOK BACK [1/3 of the time]

The first third of the meeting is about **reflecting on past commitments, caring for one another, and reinforcing vision**. This time ensures accountability, deepens relationships, and keeps everyone focused on Jesus's mission.

Care and Prayer

Begin with **gratitude and sharing burdens**:

- Each person shares something they are **thankful for**.
- Each person shares a **struggle or challenge** they are facing.
- The person sitting to their right prays specifically for them.

This practice strengthens the community, builds trust, and ensures that no one is walking through life alone. If someone is experiencing a **major struggle that needs more time and attention**, plan to stay after the meeting to offer additional care and support.

Vision

Reinforce the bigger picture—why are we here? Why do we follow Jesus?

- Sing a song that **points to loving God, loving others, making disciples, and multiplying groups**.

- OR, have individuals **share a Bible verse** that reminds them of God's mission for their lives.

This step keeps the group **mission-focused**, reminding everyone that faith is not just personal—it's meant to be shared and multiplied.

Check-In: Accountability for Obedience and Sharing

Each person reviews their **commitments from last week** by answering three key questions:

1. **How have you obeyed what you learned?**
2. **Who have you trained in what you learned?**
3. **With whom have you shared your story or God's story?**

If someone didn't follow through on a commitment, it gets **added to this week's commitments**. If someone **consistently refuses to obey what they clearly heard from God**, this becomes a serious discipleship issue that may require deeper discussion or even church discipline.

LOOK UP [1/3 of the time]

Now that we have reflected and reviewed, it's time to **seek fresh direction from God** by studying Scripture.

Pray

Start with a **simple and brief prayer**, asking God to teach and reveal His truth through His Word.

Read and Discuss

- Read the passage **out loud together**.
- Discuss the following questions:
    - **What did you like about this passage?**
    - **What did you find challenging or hard to understand?**
- **Read the passage again**, this time listening with fresh ears.

- Discuss deeper questions:
    - **What can we learn about people from this passage?**
    - **What can we learn about God from this passage?**

This method ensures that **everyone participates**, and the focus remains on **God's Word rather than personal opinions**. The goal is to uncover truths that **directly shape our lives and obedience**.

LOOK FORWARD [1/3 of the time]

Now that we have reflected on past commitments and received fresh insight from God's Word, it's time to **take action**. This is where **true discipleship happens**—when we move from hearing to obeying.

Obey. Train. Share.

Each person takes **at least five minutes in silent prayer**, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal their specific response to three questions:

1. **How will I apply and obey this passage?**
2. **Who will I train or share this passage with?**
3. **Who does God want me to share my story (testimony) or God's story with this week?**

Everyone **writes down their commitments** so that they can:

- **Pray over them throughout the week**.
- **Be held accountable the following week**.

If someone isn't sure whether a response is from God but believes it could be beneficial, they can still write it down—accountability will help clarify its direction.

Practice Together

In groups of two or three, **practice what you committed to do**:

- **Role-play** a difficult conversation or a temptation you might face.
- **Practice sharing today's passage** as if teaching it to someone else.

- **Practice sharing the Gospel** or your testimony in a simple way.

This practice ensures that when the real opportunity arises, we are **prepared and confident to obey**.

Talk with God Together

In the same small groups, pray for:

- **Each member's commitments** and the people they plan to share with.
- **God to prepare hearts** to receive the Gospel.
- **Strength and wisdom** to be obedient this week.

This prayer time **concludes the meeting**, sending everyone out **equipped and empowered to live out their faith**.

Why This Pattern Works

The **3/3 pattern** is effective because it creates a **disciple-making culture** that is:

✔ **Balanced** – It includes reflection, learning, and action.
✔ **Accountable** – No one walks alone, and everyone is held to their commitments.
✔ **Obedience-Based** – Learning leads to application, not just discussion.
✔ **Reproducible** – It can be replicated easily in new groups and new contexts.

This pattern fosters a **lifestyle of discipleship**. It trains believers to **regularly hear from God, obey Him, and share with others**—the very essence of following Jesus.

A Challenge to Small Groups

If your small group is **not yet structured for accountability and multiplication**, consider **implementing the 3/3 pattern**.

Ask yourself:

- Is our group actively **helping each other obey God's Word**?
- Are we **sharing what we learn** beyond our group?
- Are we **multiplying disciples** by equipping others?

A small group is not just a Bible study. It's a **training ground for obedience, transformation, and mission**.

NOTE THAT GROUPS CAN MAKE CORPORATE APPLICATIONS AS WELL.

Over the next few blog entries, we will explore **how to strengthen each phase of the 3/3 pattern** and make sure our small groups are **truly making disciples who make disciples**.

Let's commit to living this out—together!

SOAPS Bible Reading: A Simple and Powerful Way to Engage Scripture

As followers of Jesus, we are called to be people of the Word. Reading the Bible daily is **not just a suggestion—it's essential** for growing in faith, understanding God's will, and being transformed by His truth.

A **good rhythm** for Scripture reading is to cover at least **25-30 chapters per week**. That may sound like a lot, but when spread throughout the week, it's a very doable pace. However, simply reading isn't enough—we need to engage with what we read in a way that leads to obedience and sharing.

One of the **most effective methods** for Bible study is called **S.O.A.P.S.**, which stands for:

- **S – Scripture**: Write out one or more verses that stand out to you.
- **O – Observation**: Rewrite the verse(s) in your own words to understand them better.
- **A – Application**: Think about what it means to obey these truths in your own life.
- **P – Prayer**: Write out a prayer, committing to God what you've learned and how you plan to obey.
- **S – Sharing**: Ask God whom He wants you to share this with and commit to doing it.

This simple structure helps **any believer read, understand, obey, and share** God's Word consistently.

Why SOAPS?

The **SOAPS method** isn't just about personal Bible study—it's a tool that:

✔ **Helps you hear from God daily**
✔ **Encourages personal application**
✔ **Develops obedience-based faith**
✔ **Equips you to disciple others**

SOAPS integrates **all three parts of the 3/3 pattern**:

- **LOOK BACK** – By reviewing previous journal entries with an accountability partner.
- **LOOK UP** – By engaging directly with Scripture and prayer.
- **LOOK FORWARD** – By committing to obey and share what you've learned.

When practiced consistently, SOAPS ensures that **Bible reading isn't just an intellectual exercise—it becomes a lifestyle of obedience and multiplication**.

Example of SOAPS in Action

Let's walk through SOAPS using Isaiah 55:8-9.

S – Scripture

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9, NASB)

O – Observation

I am limited in what I know and what I can do. God is **not** limited in any way. He sees and knows **everything** and can do **anything**. His plans are far greater than anything I could come up with on my own.

A – Application

Since God's ways are **higher and better** than mine, I need to trust Him more and stop relying on my **own understanding** (Proverbs 3:5-6). When I make decisions, I should seek **God's wisdom in prayer and His Word** instead of trying to figure everything out on my own.

P – Prayer

Lord, I admit that I often try to run my life my own way. But I don't know the future, and I don't always make the best choices. Your ways are higher than mine. Please teach me to follow Your ways instead of my own. Help me to trust Your wisdom over my limited understanding. Fill me with Your Spirit so I can walk in obedience today.

S – Sharing

I will share these verses and my application with **my friend, Steve**, who is struggling with a big life decision. I will encourage him to **trust in God's wisdom instead of trying to figure things out on his own**.

Making SOAPS a Habit

SOAPS Bible reading is not **just for personal study**—it works **best when practiced in community**. Here's how you can incorporate it into **daily life and group settings**:

1. Use SOAPS for Personal Devotions

- Set aside **at least 20 minutes each day** to read Scripture and journal using SOAPS.
- Keep a **notebook or digital journal** where you record your insights, prayers, and commitments. The free app SOAPS Journal is a great option.
- Be intentional about **sharing what you learn with someone every week**.

2. Review SOAPS with an Accountability Partner

- Meet **weekly or bi-weekly** with a friend or mentor to **review** your SOAPS journals.
- Ask each other:
    - Have you obeyed what you wrote down?
    - Who have you shared with?
    - What is God teaching you now?
- Hold each other accountable to **live out** God's Word.

3. Train Others in SOAPS

- Teach SOAPS to **new believers** as a simple way to engage Scripture.
- Model it in **discipleship groups** so that others learn to study, obey, and share God's Word.
- Challenge each person to **train someone else** in using this method.

The Power of Hearing, Obeying, and Sharing

Jesus made it clear that **hearing God's Word isn't enough—we must put it into practice**:

"But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not just hearers who deceive themselves." (James 1:22, NASB)

When we **breathe IN** by reading and hearing God's Word, we must also **breathe OUT** by obeying and sharing it.

The more we do this:
✔ **The more we will grow**
✔ **The clearer God's voice will become**
✔ **The more lives we will impact**

A Challenge for You

This week, **commit to using SOAPS** for your daily Bible reading. If you faithfully follow this pattern, you'll be amazed at how God transforms your life and the lives of those around you.

In the next blog entries, we'll explore **more ways to deepen our engagement with God and His people** and **make obedience-based discipleship a lifestyle**.

Let's be **doers of the Word, not just hearers**—one day at a time!

The Power of Accountability Groups: Walking Together in Truth and Love

Every follower of Jesus will **one day stand before Him and give an account** for how they lived (Romans 14:12). Because of this, it is wise and necessary to **practice accountability with others now**. Accountability groups provide an opportunity for believers to **walk together in truth and love**, strengthening one another in faith, obedience, and mission.

Jesus frequently spoke about accountability—whether in His parables about **faithful and unfaithful servants** (Matthew 25:14-30) or His direct teaching that *"on the day of judgment people will have to give an account for every careless word they speak"* (Matthew 12:36, NASB). His words remind us that **what we do, say, and think matters to God**—and it should matter to us as well.

What is an Accountability Group?

An **accountability group** is a small gathering of **two or three people of the same gender**—men with men, women with women—who meet **once a week** to discuss a set of questions that help reveal areas of growth and areas needing correction.

This small, intimate setting provides:
✔ **Encouragement** to follow Jesus faithfully.
✔ **Confession and restoration** in areas of struggle.
✔ **Prayer and support** for life's challenges.
✔ **Motivation** to obey God's Word and share the Gospel.

How Do Accountability Groups Meet?

- **Face-to-face** in a home, coffee shop, or church.
- **By phone or video call** if in-person meetings aren't possible.
- **At a set, consistent time** each week to ensure regularity.

Scripture Reading as a Foundation for Accountability

Accountability must be rooted in God's Word for it to be effective. Group members should coordinate their Scripture reading plans so they can discuss **what God is teaching them and how they are applying it**.

How to Read 25-30 Chapters Per Week

A great reading goal is to cover **25-30 chapters of the Bible weekly**. This keeps believers engaged with God's full counsel and provides **rich material for discussion and obedience**.

Some helpful tips or suggestions for consuming Scripture include:

- **The Bible Recap** by Tara-Leigh Cobble (on the Bible App).
- **Plans that cover the entire Bible in a year** (including plans that go through the New Testament twice).
- **Audio Bible options** (also available in the Bible App) for those who prefer to listen.

Choosing a **shared reading plan** strengthens accountability, ensuring that everyone is hearing from God's Word and putting it into practice.

Sample Accountability Questions

Different groups may use different sets of questions, but all should focus on **spiritual growth, obedience, and mission**. I can provide a sample set of questions for **children** as well. Here are two sample lists for adults:

Accountability Questions - List 1

1. Pray that we will **become like Jesus**.
2. How are you doing? How is your **prayer life**?
3. Do you have any **sin to confess**? (Relational, sexual, financial, pride, integrity, submission to authority, etc.)
4. Did you **obey** what God told you last time? **Share details.**
5. Did you **pray for the "unbelievers"** on your relationship list this week? Did you have the chance to share with any of them? **Share details.**
6. Did you **memorize a new verse** this week? **Quote it.**

7. Did you **read at least 25 chapters** in the Bible this week?
8. What did **God say to you** this week from the Word?
9. What are you going to **specifically do about it**?
10. Did you meet with your **3/3 group** this week? **How did it go?**
11. Did you **model or assist someone** in starting a new 3/3 group this week? **Share details.**
12. Do you see anything **hindering my walk with Christ**?
13. Did you have the **opportunity to share the Gospel** this week? **Share details.**
14. **Practice 1-3 minute testimonies** and the **Gospel** right now.
15. Who can you **invite to the group** next week? (If the group has four or more members, multiply it.)
16. **Close in prayer** based on what was shared.

Accountability Questions - List 2

1. How have your insights from last week's reading **shaped the way you think and live**?
2. Who did you **pass your insights** from last week on to, and how was it received?
3. How have you seen **God at work**?
4. Have you been a **testimony** this week to the greatness of Jesus Christ with both your **words and actions**?
5. Have you been **exposed to sexually alluring material** or allowed your mind to **entertain inappropriate sexual thoughts**?
6. Have you **acknowledged God's ownership** in your use of money?
7. Have you **coveted** anything?
8. Have you **hurt someone's reputation** or **feelings** with your words?
9. Have you been **dishonest** in word or action or **exaggerated**?
10. Have you **given in to an addictive, lazy, or undisciplined behavior**?
11. Have you been a **slave** to clothing, friends, work, or possessions?
12. Have you **failed to forgive someone**?
13. What **worries or anxieties** are you facing? Have you **complained or grumbled**?
14. Have you **maintained a thankful heart**?

15. Have you been **honoring, understanding, and generous** in your important relationships?
16. What **temptations in thought, word, or action** have you faced, and how did you respond?
17. How have you **taken opportunities to serve** or bless others, especially believers?
18. Have you seen **specific answers to prayer**?
19. Did you **complete the Bible reading** for the week?

The Power of Walking Together in Accountability

The Bible calls believers to **encourage one another daily** so that we do not fall into sin (Hebrews 3:13). Accountability groups help us:

✔ **Stay faithful in reading and obeying Scripture.**
✔ **Resist temptation and overcome struggles.**
✔ **Grow in prayer, evangelism, and disciple-making.**
✔ **Ensure we are not just hearers of the Word but doers.**

A Challenge for You

- If you **don't have an accountability group**, **start one this week**.
- Find **one or two others** of the same gender who are committed to **following Jesus seriously**.
- Choose **a Bible reading plan** to do together.
- Pick **a list of accountability questions** to ask each week.
- Commit to **meeting regularly** and praying for one another.

Accountability isn't just a nice option—it's a key to spiritual growth. In the coming blog entries, we will explore **more ways to deepen our walk with Christ and multiply disciples**.

Let's be intentional about walking together in truth and love!

Tools to Help Us Grow Through Prayer

Prayer is one of the most vital aspects of our walk with God. It is how we communicate with Him, listen to His voice, and align our hearts with His will. Yet, many believers struggle to pray consistently or feel unsure of what to say when they do. Thankfully, God has provided **various tools to help us grow through prayer**—tools that can deepen our conversations with Him and increase our capacity for prayer.

One such tool is **The Prayer Cycle**, a simple yet powerful structure that helps believers engage in a full hour of meaningful prayer.

The Prayer Cycle: A Practical Guide to an Hour of Prayer

The **Bible calls us to "pray without ceasing"** (1 Thessalonians 5:17, NASB), but many of us find that difficult to do. The **Prayer Cycle** provides **twelve five-minute segments** that lead us through **twelve biblical types of prayer**. By following this pattern, we can **pray for a full hour** and **train ourselves in different aspects of prayer**.

Here is a step-by-step breakdown of the **Prayer Cycle**:

1. PRAISE

Begin by **praising the Lord** for who He is and what He has done.

- Praise Him for specific blessings in your life.
- Reflect on **His attributes**—His faithfulness, mercy, and love.
- Thank Him for His goodness to your family.

2. WAIT

Spend time **waiting on the Lord** in silence.

- Be still before Him (Psalm 46:10).
- Allow your heart to **settle and focus on His presence**.
- Let Him bring reflections to your mind.

3. CONFESS

Ask the Holy Spirit to **reveal any unconfessed sin** in your life.

- Confess both **attitudes and actions** that have displeased God.
- Seek His **forgiveness and cleansing** (1 John 1:9).
- Accept the **freedom and renewal** that comes with confession.

4. READ THE WORD

Open your Bible and **read a passage** from Psalms, the Prophets, or the New Testament.

- Let **Scripture shape your prayers**.
- Listen for what God is **highlighting for you today**.

5. ASK

Bring your **personal requests** before God.

- Pray about **your needs, struggles, and desires**.
- Ask for **wisdom, strength, and provision** in specific areas of your life.

6. INTERCESSION

Lift up the needs of **others** in prayer.

- Pray for **family, friends, coworkers, and church members**.
- Intercede for **the lost**, asking God to bring them to salvation.
- Pray for **leaders, missionaries, and global issues**.

7. PRAY THE WORD

Pray specific **Scripture passages** as part of your prayer.

- Use **Psalms** and other biblical prayers.
- Let God's Word **guide and shape your intercessions**.

8. THANK

Express **gratitude to God** for all He has done.

- Give thanks for **answered prayers**.
- Thank Him for **His faithfulness and provision**.

9. SING

Worship God through **singing a hymn or worship song**.

- Sing out loud or in your heart.
- Use **music as a way to draw near to Him**.

10. MEDITATE

Ask the Lord to **speak to you personally**.

- Have a **pen and paper ready** to record what He impresses upon your heart.
- Let **His voice guide your thoughts and responses**.

11. LISTEN

Spend time **merging everything you have read, prayed, and sung**.

- Listen for **how God brings these elements together**.
- Be still and let Him **speak to your heart**.

12. PRAISE (Again!)

Close your prayer time by **praising God again**.

- Thank Him for the **time you have spent in His presence**.
- Worship Him for **His majesty and power**.

This **prayer cycle** is based on **Dick Eastman's book, *The Hour That Changes the World***. It is a **powerful tool** for deepening your prayer life and can be used **individually or in groups**.

Other Helpful Prayer Resources

One of the reasons I love the **Prayer Cycle** is that it **expands our capacity for prayer**. However, this is just **one of many helpful prayer tools** available.

I encourage you to explore **other versions of the Prayer Cycle and additional prayer resources** here:

Prayer Resources Link

Some of the **key resources** available at that link include:

1. Prayer Trails

A collection of **12-segment prayer guides** that focus on various themes such as:

- Praying in worship.
- Praying for spiritual growth.
- Praying for missions and the nations.
- Etc.

2. Missions Prayer Guides

Specific guides designed to **help believers pray strategically for the world**, including:

- Prayers for **unreached people groups**.
- Prayers for **missionaries and persecuted believers**.

3. Equipping Children in Prayer

Resources to help **train children to pray**, making prayer a **natural and powerful part of their lives**.

4. The Blessing Booklet

One of my favorite tools! This guide provides **specific prayers of blessing for children and grandchildren**, covering areas like:

- Their **relationship with God**.
- Their **character development**.
- Their **future and calling**.

5. The Prayer Pathway app (free on Google Play or the App Store)

A **practical tool for daily prayer**, offering:

- **Guided prayers** for every day of the month.
- Specific **themes and focus areas** to ensure **balanced and consistent intercession**.

Praying for the World with Prayer.Global

If you are looking for a **dynamic way to pray for the world**, I highly recommend **Prayer.Global**.

This site provides **clear guidance on what to pray for**.
It is **engaging, easy to use, and highly effective**.
Many people find it **addictive in the best possible way!**

Praying for **nations, people groups, and global issues** allows us to **join in God's work worldwide**.

Why Prayer Tools Matter

All of these tools exist for one reason: **to help us listen to the Holy Spirit and respond to Him**.

They guide us in stewarding what God speaks to us.
They help us grow in obedience and alignment with God's will.
They equip us to intercede for others more effectively.

As we incorporate these resources into our lives, our **prayer lives will deepen, our faith will grow, and our relationship with God will strengthen**.

A Challenge for You

1. **Try the Prayer Pathway app this week.** Download it on your phone and begin to use it as part of your daily time with the Lord.
2. **Explore the resources linked above** and find a tool that resonates with you.
3. **Share what you learn** with others—encourage friends, family, or small groups to grow in prayer together.

Prayer **changes us**. Prayer **aligns us with God's will**. And prayer **transforms the world around us**.

Let's commit to growing in prayer—one step at a time!

Prayerwalking: Seeing the World Through God's Eyes

Prayer is more than speaking words to God—it is **a way of life, a continuous conversation** with the One who created us. As we walk with Him daily, our relationship grows deeper, and we begin to see the world **from His perspective**. One of the most transformative ways to develop this spiritual awareness is through **prayerwalking**.

Prayerwalking is a **simple but powerful practice**: praying while walking through a community, interceding for the people, places, and needs around us. It is a way of **actively engaging with God**, tuning our hearts to His, and asking Him to move in the world around us.

Why Prayerwalking?

Jesus taught us to pray, *"Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matthew 6:10, NASB). When we prayerwalk, we are **actively seeking the gaps between God's will and what we see in the world**, asking Him to bring **His kingdom** into those places.

Prayerwalking also helps us:
✔ **Develop spiritual awareness**—seeing beyond the surface and discerning God's heart for people and places.
✔ **Practice listening to the Holy Spirit**—allowing Him to guide our prayers and actions.
✔ **Obey the Great Commission**—looking for ways to extend conversations and share the Gospel.
✔ **Move from prayer as a ritual to prayer as a lifestyle**—transforming how we engage with God daily.

How to Prayerwalk

1. Prayerwalking with a Partner

While you can prayerwalk alone, it is **best done with a partner**. When two people prayerwalk together:

- There is a **three-way conversation** between **you, your friend, and the Lord**.
- Your prayers **build on one another**, leading to insights and directions neither of you might have discovered alone.
- It strengthens **spiritual unity and encouragement** (Matthew 18:20).

2. Four Ways to Determine What to Pray

As you walk, there are **four primary ways** to guide your prayers:

Observation

Pray based on what you **see, hear, or sense** in the environment.

- A **tricycle in a yard** may prompt you to pray for children and families.
- A **for sale sign** might lead you to pray for people struggling with housing or finances.
- A **school building** could remind you to pray for teachers, students, and their families.

Revelation

Sometimes, the Holy Spirit brings something to your mind that seems unrelated to what you are physically seeing.

- A **topic, person, or idea** may surface in your heart—pray about it! For some people, this happens through seeing pictures in their mind.
- This requires **spiritual sensitivity**, which grows with practice.

Research

If you know specific **challenges in a neighborhood or city**, you can pray with deeper understanding.

- If you have read about **high unemployment, crime, or homelessness**, ask God to bring change.

- **Pre-planning and intentionality** can make your prayerwalking even more effective.

Scripture-Based Prayer

- Choose a **passage of Scripture** to pray over an area before you begin.
- Ask God to **lead you to relevant verses** as you walk.
- Praying God's Word aligns our hearts **with His promises and will**.

Praying for People You Encounter

One of the most powerful aspects of prayerwalking is **praying for people in real time**. When you meet someone, start by **asking them if you can pray for them**. If they say yes, begin with their specific request. Then, ask the Lord to guide your prayers using the **BLESS** acrostic:

- **B – Body (health)** – Pray for healing, strength, and physical well-being.
- **L – Labor (work)** – Pray for their job, studies, or responsibilities.
- **E – Economics (finances) OR Emotions (morale)** – Pray for financial provision and emotional strength.
- **S – Social (relationships)** – Pray for their family, friendships, and connections.
- **S – Spiritual** – Pray for their relationship with God, growth in faith, and spiritual hunger.

Blessed to Be a Blessing:

- Always pray that the person **will have the means not only to meet their needs but also to bless others**.
- For example, if praying for their finances, ask God to provide **so they can also be financially generous with others in need**.

If They Are a Believer… Invite Them to Prayerwalk With You!

If someone you pray for is already a follower of Jesus, **invite them to join you**.

- This equips and **motivates them to continue prayerwalking** in their own life.
- It can lead to **new discipleship opportunities and spiritual growth**.

If They Are Not Yet a Believer… Look for an Opportunity to Share

After praying, consider extending the conversation:

- **Share a personal testimony**—how God has answered your prayers or changed your life.
- Ask if they would like to hear **about Jesus and how He transforms lives**.
- Be **sensitive to the Holy Spirit**, who will guide you in how and what and when to speak.

Prayerwalking Can Become Prayerliving

With practice, **prayerwalking can become a habit**—one that transforms how we interact with the world. Over time, it shifts us from just prayerwalking to **prayerliving**.

This is part of what Paul meant when he wrote:
"Pray without ceasing." (1 Thessalonians 5:17, NASB)

When prayerwalking becomes part of our daily lives:
We become **more aware of God's presence** throughout the day.
We pray **spontaneously** for people, places, and situations.
We engage in **ongoing dialogue with God** about what we see.
We live in **expectation**, looking for how God is at work around us.

A Challenge for You

1. **Plan a prayerwalk this week.**

- Choose a **neighborhood, school, or workplace** to walk through.
- Invite a **friend or family member** to join you.

2. **Use one or more of the four ways to decide what to pray** (Observation, Revelation, Research, or Scripture). Observation and Revelation are the most commonly used.

3. **Be ready to pray for someone you meet.**

- **Ask if you can pray for them.**
- Use the **BLESS framework** to guide your prayers.

4. **Journal what God shows you.**

- Reflect on how He **led your prayers and spoke to you**.
- Consider making **prayerwalking a regular habit**.

Seeing the World as God Sees It

Prayerwalking is **more than a spiritual exercise**—it is a **way of engaging with God's heart for the world**. When we walk through a community with **spiritual eyes open**, we begin to **see people as He sees them**.

Jesus **walked through towns and villages**, teaching, healing, and praying. He saw **beyond the surface** into people's **deep needs,** and he invites us to do the same.

Will you step out and begin to **prayerwalk with Jesus**? It may just change how you see the world forever.

Hupakouo: Growing in Our Ability to Hear and Obey God

God is always speaking. The question is—are we really listening?

The Greek word **hupakouo** means **"to obey"**, but at its root, it signifies **intensely hearing**—to **super-hear**. It is the kind of hearing that leads to action. This is the word used in **Hebrews 5:8-9 (NLT):**

"Even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him."

True obedience comes from **truly hearing**—not just with our ears, but with our hearts. That's the essence of **hupakouo**, and it's the foundation of a growing relationship with God.

Hearing God's Voice: A Lifelong Journey

Many believers struggle with recognizing God's voice. Some wonder **if He even speaks to them**, while others may have heard Him but struggle to discern His leading consistently. Yet, Scripture makes it clear:

- *"My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."* (John 10:27, NASB)
- *"Your ears will hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right or to the left."* (Isaiah 30:21, NASB)

Our **goal as disciples** is to grow in awareness and recognition of God's voice so that we can **obey Him more fully**.

The **Hupakouo app** is designed to help believers **practice listening to God daily**. It provides a **simple yet powerful way** to:
✔ Ask God intentional questions.
✔ Journal what you sense Him saying.
✔ Share insights with others.
✔ Develop a **habit of listening** to Him throughout the day.

If we want to **increase our ability to hear God**, we must **train our spiritual ears**—and questioning God in the right way is a great way to do that.

Is It Okay to Question God?

Some people feel **uneasy about asking God questions**, thinking it might be irreverent or a sign of doubt. But questioning God **can actually be one of the most worshipful activities we engage in**—as long as our motives are right.

When we ask questions in order to:
✔ **Better understand God's heart**
✔ **Align ourselves with His will**
✔ **Respond in obedience**

… then our questioning is an **act of humility and surrender**, not rebellion.

Our response to God's answers reveals our hearts. If we listen and adjust our actions accordingly, we demonstrate **true devotion** and a willingness to obey.

The Power of Spiritual Questions

The questions we ask **reveal something about our hearts**. A great way to start **spiritual conversations with others** is to ask:

"Assuming there is a God, and you could ask Him anything, what would you ask?"

This simple question can open the door to **deep and meaningful discussions** about faith, purpose, and God's involvement in our lives.

At the same time, we must remember that **God is not obligated to answer every question we ask**. There are several reasons why He might withhold an answer:

- **Some things are not for us to know.** (John 21:20-23)
- **We may not be ready for the answer.** (Spiritual maturity takes time.)
- **We may not be willing to obey what He reveals.** (God entrusts wisdom to those who will steward it well.)
- **We may be asking the wrong questions.** (Sometimes God redirects our focus to something more important.)

If we truly want to hear from God, we must **position ourselves in a way that increases our ability to recognize His voice**.

Three Ways to Hear God More Clearly

If we want to grow in our ability to hear and understand God's voice, we can focus on three key areas:

1. Radical Submission to God

The more we **surrender every aspect of our lives—our relationships, possessions, and plans—to God**, the more He can **entrust us with His voice**.

Jesus said, *"If anyone wants to do His will, he will know about the teaching, whether it is of God or I am speaking from Myself."* (John 7:17, NASB)

When we approach God **with a heart already committed to obeying**, we **position ourselves to hear more clearly**.

2. Saturation in Scripture

The more we **soak ourselves in God's Word**, the more we will:
Understand how God speaks
Recognize His character
Discern His ways throughout history

God will never speak **in contradiction to His written Word**. The more we know the Bible, the easier it is to **filter out distractions and lies** that might try to compete for our attention.

3. Living in Constant Conversation with God

Instead of only talking to God **at designated prayer times**, we can cultivate **a continual dialogue with Him**.

Asking Him what **He thinks** about situations we face.
Inviting Him into our **daily decisions and interactions**.
Looking at life through the lens of **His perspective**.

The more we practice **moment-by-moment awareness of God's presence**, the more natural it becomes to **hear and recognize His voice**.

Using the Hupakouo App to Build a Listening Habit

If you're new to **asking God questions**, the **Hupakouo app** is a great way to start.

Here's how you can use it effectively:
Ask God at least one question each day.
Spend a few moments in **silence**, listening for any impressions He gives.
Journal what you sense Him saying.
Share insights with a trusted friend or mentor.
Set an alarm to remind yourself to pause and listen to God throughout the day.

With time and practice, **your conversations with God will become second nature**—not just something you do occasionally, but a **way of life**.

Download Hupakouo for free via the website or on Google Play or the App Store.

Additional Resource for Hearing God's Voice

If you need more guidance on how to **hear and recognize God's voice**, I encourage you to download a free copy of my book:

The Only One

This book contains **an entire section** devoted to **developing spiritual ears** and growing in confidence in hearing God's voice.

A Challenge for You

1. **Download the Hupakouo app and commit to asking God at least one question per day.**
2. **Be intentional about listening—write down what you hear.**
3. **Immerse yourself in Scripture to better recognize His voice.**
4. **Invite others into the journey—discuss what God is showing you.**

God is speaking. **Are you ready to listen?**

By developing a **lifestyle of hearing and obeying**, we move beyond just being **hearers of the Word**—we become **doers** (James 1:22).

Let's commit to **super-hearing**—to ***hupakouo***—and watch how God transforms our lives!

From Garden to Glory: How Genesis and Revelation Complete the Story

The Bible is not just a collection of spiritual truths or isolated stories. It is one unified narrative—a story of creation, rebellion, redemption, and restoration. Nowhere is this clearer than when we compare the **first chapters of Genesis** with the **last chapters of Revelation**.

These bookends of Scripture form a breathtaking arc. The story begins in a garden with God's presence, human purpose, and unbroken peace—and ends in a radiant city, filled with God's glory, a redeemed people, and eternal joy. What was **broken by sin in Genesis is fully restored by grace in Revelation**.

Let's explore the rich and inspiring parallels between these two anchor points of Scripture.

1. Creation → New Creation

Genesis opens with the words:
"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)

Everything God made was good, full of beauty and purpose. But after the fall, creation was subjected to decay (Romans 8:20–21).

Revelation completes the story:
"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth..." (Revelation 21:1)

This is not a spiritual escape from creation but a **renewal** of it. Just as the first creation came from God's Word, the new creation comes from His promise. We are not returning to Eden—we are moving forward to something greater: a **redeemed cosmos**, where righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13).

2. God's Light and Presence Restored

In Genesis, God says,
"Let there be light," and there was light. (Genesis 1:3)

That light defined the beginning of creation.

In Revelation,
"They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light." (Revelation 22:5)

The **light of God's presence** now fully fills the new world. There is **no more night**, no more hiding—only the glory of the Lamb.

3. God Walks With Humanity → God Dwells With His People Forever

In Eden,
"They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden..." (Genesis 3:8)

That nearness was broken by sin.

But in Revelation, God says,
"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man... they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them." (Revelation 21:3)

What was **lost in Eden is restored forever**—not just occasional visits, but **permanent presence**.

4. The Tree of Life Lost and Recovered

In Genesis, the tree of life was central to the garden, but access was cut off after the fall (Genesis 3:22–24).

In Revelation,
"The tree of life... bore twelve kinds of fruit... and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." (Revelation 22:2)

The **tree reappears**—not guarded by angels but freely available to all who belong to the Lamb. Healing and life are no longer withheld.

5. From Death to Eternal Life

Genesis 3 introduces death as the result of sin:
"By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground..." (Genesis 3:19)

But Revelation 21:4 declares,
"There shall be no more death."

The power of death is broken. God **wipes away every tear**, and what once brought sorrow is replaced with **eternal joy**.

6. Satan's Work Introduced → Satan's End Declared

Genesis 3 shows the serpent deceiving Eve and introducing rebellion into creation.

But Revelation 20:10 brings that story to a close:
"And the devil... was thrown into the lake of fire... and will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

The **enemy is defeated**. Evil doesn't win; Jesus does.

7. The Curse Introduced → The Curse Removed

Genesis 3 is filled with sorrowful consequences: pain in childbirth, toil in work, conflict in relationships, and eventual death.

Revelation reverses this:
"No longer will there be any curse." (Revelation 22:3)

The world will no longer groan under sin. God's servants will serve Him without hindrance or suffering.

8. From Hiding to Seeing God's Face

After the fall, Adam and Eve hide from God's presence in shame (Genesis 3:10).

But in Revelation 22:4,
"They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads."

This is the **deepest intimacy** possible: no more shame, no more separation—just face-to-face fellowship with the God who made and redeemed us.

9. Human Dominion Broken → Restored Reign with Christ

In Genesis, humanity is given dominion:
"Fill the earth and subdue it; rule over the fish... the birds... every living creature." (Genesis 1:28)

But sin distorts that calling. Instead of wise stewards, we became broken rulers.

In Revelation,
"They will reign forever and ever." (Revelation 22:5)

Those who belong to Christ are restored as **co-heirs**, **reigning with Him in righteousness**.

10. The First Marriage → The Final Marriage

Genesis 2 ends with Adam and Eve's union—the first marriage.

Revelation 19:7 announces the culmination of all redemptive history:
"The marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready."

The Church, redeemed and radiant, is **united with Christ**, her Bridegroom. The story that began with a couple in a garden ends with a **wedding feast** in glory.

Living in the Story

The Bible is not just a story to be studied—it's a **story to live in**. Every follower of Jesus is part of this great arc:

- From brokenness to restoration
- From exile to home
- From shame to glory
- From separation to intimacy

If you feel the ache of what's been lost—take heart. The end of the story has already been written, and it is **very good**.

As disciple-makers, this vision shapes our mission. We invite people not just to believe, but to **come home** to the God who restores all things.

So let's walk forward with **Genesis roots** and **Revelation hope**. The story began in a garden—but it ends in glory. And by grace, we are part of that journey.

"He who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'"
—Revelation 21:5

From Babel to the Body: How Christ Unites What Pride Scattered

The story of the Bible is not just about personal salvation—it's about the restoration of a broken world. In *Genesis 11*, the Tower of Babel tells the story of **human pride, false unity, and scattering**. But through the gospel, God is writing a better ending: **unity in Christ**, a redeemed people from every language and nation, gathered around one name.

The parallels between the **Tower of Babel** and the **New Testament story of redemption** are striking. What began as rebellion and confusion ends in worship and unity—not through human effort, but through God's grace in Christ.

Let's trace the journey from Babel to the Body of Christ and see how **Jesus reverses what sin scattered**.

1. Human Pride vs. God's Glory

Genesis 11:4
"Let us build ourselves a city... and make a name for ourselves."

At Babel, humanity tries to **unite apart from God**. Their goal is self-exaltation—to make a name for themselves. It's a story of building upward, not in worship, but in pride.

Philippians 2:9–11
"Therefore God exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name..."

In the gospel, God doesn't honor human pride—He exalts **Jesus**. The true unity of the human race is not in making our name great, but in **bowing to His**.

2. Confused Languages vs. Spirit-Led Understanding

Genesis 11:7–8
"Come, let Us go down and confuse their language... so they may not understand one another."

The result of Babel's pride is **division and confusion**. Different languages lead to the scattering of nations, and humanity becomes fragmented.

Acts 2:4–11
"Each one was hearing them speak in his own language… we hear them in our own tongues the mighty deeds of God!"

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit does the **opposite** of Babel: He enables people from every nation to hear the gospel in their own language. **Unity through the Spirit** replaces confusion from pride.

3. Building a City to Reach Heaven vs. Heaven Coming Down

Genesis 11:4
"Let us build… a tower that reaches to the heavens…"

Babel represents humanity's effort to **climb to God**—to achieve salvation or greatness by human strength.

Revelation 21:2
"I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God…"

In Christ, we don't reach up—**God comes down**. The New Jerusalem is not built by human hands. It is a gift of **grace**, not a monument to works.

4. Scattered Nations vs. Gathered Worship

Genesis 11:9
"From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth."

Babel ends with a fragmented world—people pushed apart and isolated by language, fear, and pride.

Revelation 7:9
"A great multitude… from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues… stood before the throne."

The story ends with **nations gathered**, not around a tower, but around the **Throne of the Lamb**. What was divided is now united—in worship.

5. Self-Glory vs. Christ-Glory

Babel's builders sought to **secure their future** and avoid being forgotten by building a name for themselves.

But in the gospel, we are invited to **die to self-glory** and live to magnify Christ.

Galatians 2:20
"It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."

The **Church**, the Body of Christ, is not a monument to human vision—it is the result of **God's Spirit uniting diverse people** under one Head: Jesus.

Summary: From Babel to the Body

Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)	Fulfilled in Christ and the Church
Built to make a name for man	Christ is given the name above every name (Phil. 2)
God confuses languages	At Pentecost, God unites languages (Acts 2)
People are scattered	Nations are gathered in Christ (Rev. 7:9)
Unity apart from God	Unity through the Spirit in Christ (Eph. 4:3–6)
Earth to heaven (tower)	Heaven comes to earth (New Jerusalem)

What It Means for Us Today

The story of Babel is not ancient myth—it's a mirror for our times. We still try to build our identity without God. We still cling to pride, power, and performance. But the gospel calls us into a **better city**, a better name, and a better unity.

Through Christ:

- **Languages are not barriers—they're bridges** for the gospel.
- **Nations are not rivals—they're worshipers** in one choir.
- **Unity is not manufactured—it's gifted** by the Spirit.

As disciple-makers, we are not building towers. We are building **Kingdom communities**—humble, Spirit-filled, cross-shaped people who reveal what it looks like when **God dwells among His people**.

Let's reject the spirit of Babel and embrace the call of Jesus, who prayed, *"That they may be one... so that the world may believe."* (John 17:21)

We're not striving to reach heaven.
Heaven has come to us.

From Deceiver to Prince: The Redemption of Jacob

There is something deeply human in the story of Jacob. His life is filled with ambition, insecurity, broken relationships, and ultimately, redemption. He is not a man of flawless character, yet he is chosen by God. Through his story, we witness the incredible truth that God does not bless us because we are perfect, but because He is gracious—and He desires to transform us.

The Stolen Blessing

Jacob's life begins in tension. Even in the womb, he and his twin brother Esau struggle. When Esau is born first, Jacob follows closely—grasping Esau's heel, earning him the name *Jacob*, meaning "heel-grabber" or more idiomatically, "supplanter" or "deceiver."

Years later, Jacob seizes the opportunity to take Esau's birthright for a bowl of stew (Genesis 25:29–34). But it is in Genesis 27 that we see the depth of his deception. At his mother Rebekah's urging, Jacob disguises himself as Esau to steal the blessing from his aging and blind father, Isaac.

Jacob goes to great lengths to deceive—covering himself with goat skins to mimic Esau's hairy arms, wearing his brother's clothes to smell like him, and lying directly to his father:

"Isaac said to his son, 'How is it that you have it so quickly, my son?' And he said, 'Because the Lord your God made it come to me.'" (Genesis 27:20, NASB)

Not only does Jacob deceive his father, but he invokes the Lord's name to give weight to the lie. The blessing he receives is indeed powerful and prophetic, but it is obtained under false pretenses. It is not given to *Jacob*—it is given to a false version of him, to "Esau."

Jacob is then forced to flee for his life, beginning decades of exile and hardship. Though he has the blessing in his hand, it is hollow—he is not at peace, and he is not yet changed.

Wrestling in the Night

Fast forward many years. Jacob has prospered materially but remains estranged from Esau. Now, as he prepares to return to Canaan, he faces his greatest fear—meeting his brother. Terrified that Esau might still want to kill him, Jacob sends gifts ahead and divides his camp.

Then something strange and transformative happens. Alone in the night, Jacob is confronted by a mysterious man and wrestles with him until daybreak:

"Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak." (Genesis 32:24, NASB)

This is no ordinary man. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that Jacob is wrestling with God Himself—or, more specifically, the Angel of the Lord, a manifestation of God's presence. Hosea 12:4 confirms this interpretation:

"Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed; he wept and pleaded for his favor."

Jacob wrestles not just physically, but spiritually and emotionally. It is a struggle for identity, for blessing, for reconciliation with both God and man.

A True Blessing—And a New Identity

The pivotal moment comes when the angel asks a question:

"Then he said, 'Let me go, for the dawn is breaking.' But he said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' So he said to him, 'What is your name?'" (Genesis 32:26–27a, NASB)

Here we see the divine invitation to confession. Years earlier, when Isaac had asked Jacob, "Who are you, my son?" he answered, "I am Esau." But now, when God asks him, "What is your name?" Jacob answers truthfully:

"And he said, 'Jacob.'" (Genesis 32:27b, NASB)

This is not a trivial detail. This is repentance. By stating his name—*Jacob*, the deceiver—he owns who he really is. He confesses not just a name but a pattern of manipulation, deceit, and striving.

And God responds, not with condemnation, but transformation:

"He said, 'Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have contended with God and with men, and have prevailed.'" (Genesis 32:28, NASB)

Israel means "God contends" or "Prince of God." It is a name not of deception, but of destiny. This is the true blessing. This time, it is not stolen or earned through trickery. It is received in humility and truth. And it is given to *Jacob*—not to an imposter, not under disguise, but to the real, broken man who clings to God and will not let go.

A Picture of the New Birth

Jacob's story is our story. We are all born into sin, into striving, often trying to wear disguises to earn favor, success, or even spiritual standing. We may try to be someone we're not to receive the world's version of blessing. But it leaves us restless, alone, and afraid.

Yet God meets us in our darkest moments—when we're alone and vulnerable. He invites us to stop pretending. To say our name. To confess who we are.

And when we do, when we come to Him not as imposters but in honesty and repentance, He gives us a new name.

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." (2 Corinthians 5:17, NASB)

Just as Jacob became Israel, so every believer who comes to Jesus in faith becomes someone new. We are no longer defined by our past, our failures, or even our sins. We are given a new identity—as children of God, as co-heirs with Christ, as citizens of heaven.

Clinging to God's Blessing

What stands out most in Jacob's midnight wrestling is his tenacity. He won't let go of God until he receives the blessing. He may limp away with a physical injury, but spiritually, he walks forward as a new man.

There is something to be said about this kind of spiritual persistence. In our walk with God, there are seasons when we must wrestle—through doubt, fear, sorrow, or conviction. But in that wrestling, when we cling to God and confess our need, we don't come away empty. We come away transformed.

Encouragement for Today

Are you weary from striving? Have you ever felt like you had to "fake it" to receive blessing or approval—from others, or even from God?

Take heart in Jacob's story. God isn't asking you to be someone else. He is asking for you to come as you are—honestly, humbly—and let Him do the work of transformation.

Like Jacob, you don't have to live as a deceiver. In Christ, you can walk as a prince. You can be renamed, reborn, and blessed—not for who you pretend to be, but for who you truly are, when surrendered to God.

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." (John 1:12, NASB)

You are no longer Jacob. You are Israel.

You are no longer lost. You are beloved.

You are no longer who you were. You are made new.

From Deception to Transformation: The Journey of Jacob [Alternate version]

The life of Jacob, son of Isaac and Rebekah, is one of the most striking stories of transformation in all of Scripture. His journey from a deceitful schemer to a man who wrestled with God and was renamed "Israel" is a powerful picture of grace, repentance, and renewal. In many ways, Jacob's life illustrates the spiritual journey every believer must take—where false identities are stripped away, sin is confronted, and true blessing is found in surrender to God.

Let's explore the two defining moments in Jacob's story—when he stole Esau's blessing in Genesis 27, and when he wrestled with God in Genesis 32—and how these episodes reveal both the danger of self-reliance and the beauty of God's redemptive power.

A Stolen Blessing Through a False Identity

In Genesis 27, Jacob participates in an elaborate deception. With the encouragement of his mother Rebekah, he disguises himself as his older brother Esau in order to receive the blessing intended for Esau, the firstborn. Jacob puts on Esau's garments, covers his hands and neck with goat hair to mimic Esau's rough skin, and lies to his father, Isaac, claiming to be Esau.

"Isaac said to him, 'Are you really my son Esau?' And he said, 'I am.'"

— Genesis 27:24, NASB

This act of deception worked. Jacob received the blessing, but the result was catastrophic. Esau's anger forced Jacob to flee for his life. For the next twenty years, Jacob would experience hardship, conflict, and divine discipline. Although he had received a blessing, it came through fraud. In a sense, it was a "false blessing," because it wasn't based on who Jacob truly was. He had received it under a false identity. What he gained in that moment was not peace or favor, but guilt, fear, and exile.

How many of us strive for success or acceptance while hiding behind false versions of ourselves? Whether through self-righteousness, performance, or manipulation, we sometimes attempt to secure God's favor—or the approval of

others—without dealing with the truth of who we are. Like Jacob, we may wear the garments of someone else, hoping for blessing, but deep down we know it is not authentic.

Wrestling with God: A Turning Point

Fast forward to Genesis 32. Jacob is finally returning to the land of promise after years away, and he is about to face his brother Esau. The night before the encounter, Jacob is alone—fearful, uncertain, and desperate. And then something extraordinary happens:

"Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak."

— Genesis 32:24, NASB

Jacob finds himself in a mysterious, intense struggle with what the passage later reveals to be no ordinary man, but a divine being—often understood to be a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ or the Angel of the Lord.

At one point during the struggle, the "man" says to Jacob:

"'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.'"

— Genesis 32:27, NASB

This moment is profound. Years earlier, when asked his name by his father, Jacob lied and said, "I am Esau." But now, face to face with God, he answers truthfully: "I am Jacob." The name "Jacob" means "heel-grabber," "supplanter," or "deceiver." In this confession, Jacob is finally acknowledging who he truly is. He is not hiding. He is not pretending to be someone else. This is a moment of repentance—an admission of his flawed, broken identity.

And God responds not with condemnation, but with transformation:

"He said, 'Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have contended with God and with men, and have prevailed.'"

— Genesis 32:28, NASB

Jacob receives a true blessing—not one obtained through deceit, but one granted through persistent surrender. He is given a new name, Israel, meaning "he who strives with God" or "prince of God." This marks a new beginning in Jacob's life. No longer defined by his past, he now carries a new identity and a deeper relationship with the God of his fathers.

From Jacob to Israel: A Picture of Redemption

Jacob's story is a mirror for every one of us. We all start out like Jacob—marked by sin, self-reliance, and a tendency to manipulate or control. We may try to secure a sense of worth or blessing through our own efforts, even if it means presenting a false self to the world or to God.

But God calls us to something better. He invites us into the struggle—the holy wrestling where our masks are removed, and we are brought to the end of ourselves. Only when we acknowledge who we truly are—flawed, weak, in need—can we receive the true blessing that comes from God alone.

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

— 2 Corinthians 5:17, NASB

Just as Jacob was renamed Israel, those who come to Christ in repentance and faith are given a new identity. We are no longer defined by our failures, our past, or our striving. We are children of God, heirs with Christ, saints redeemed by grace.

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name."

— John 1:12, NASB

Persistence in the Struggle

One of the most compelling aspects of Jacob's encounter is his refusal to let go:

"Then he said, 'I will not let You go unless You bless me.'"

— Genesis 32:26, NASB

Jacob's desperate persistence is what we all need—a refusal to walk away from God, even in the middle of pain, uncertainty, or discipline. True blessing comes to those who cling to God, even when it hurts, even when the struggle seems endless.

This kind of wrestling is not a sign of unbelief, but of faith. Jacob did not run away. He held on. And in doing so, he met the transforming power of God.

A New Name Awaits

Are you still striving under a false identity? Are you pretending to be someone you're not in order to gain approval or security? The story of Jacob offers hope. God is not looking for perfect people—He is looking for honest ones. When we come to Him with the truth of who we are, He meets us with grace, changes our name, and gives us a new future.

Jacob's transformation reminds us that true blessing comes not through deception or performance, but through repentance and surrender. It is when we stop pretending and start wrestling that we discover who we really are—and who God has created us to be.

Let us come honestly before God, confessing our need, and clinging to Him. For in that holy struggle, we find the blessing that can never be stolen—the blessing of being truly known and deeply loved.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied."

— Matthew 5:6, NASB

May we, like Jacob, be willing to walk the road from deception to transformation —and may we, like Israel, live in the joy of a new name and a new identity in Christ.

The Timeless Promises of God: Hope Beyond This Life

God is always faithful to His promises—but not always in the way or on the timeline we expect. Many of His greatest assurances find their fullest fulfillment not in this present life, but in the life to come. This may be difficult to accept in a world that prizes instant results, but for those who trust Him, this truth becomes a source of deep hope, strength, and joy. The eternal nature of God's promises reminds us that His faithfulness is not bound by time, and that His blessings are far greater than anything we might receive in this fleeting life.

Let's explore this idea through the lens of Scripture, focusing on patriarchs like Abraham and Jacob, and ultimately finding comfort in the words of Jesus Himself.

Abraham: A Promise Deferred but Not Denied

In Genesis 12, God made a sweeping promise to Abraham:

"And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing."

— Genesis 12:2, NASB

Later, God expands this promise, telling Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens (Genesis 15:5). Yet by the time Abraham died, he had only one son of promise, Isaac, and a tiny foothold in the Promised Land—just a burial plot (Genesis 23:17-20).

Did God fail to keep His word? Not at all.

The writer of Hebrews reflects on this very point:

"All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen and welcomed them from a distance… But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one."

— Hebrews 11:13,16a, NASB

Abraham believed, even when he didn't see the full results in his lifetime. His faith rested not in the immediate, but in the eternal. God's promise was bigger than

Abraham could have imagined—it extended into eternity, encompassing both earthly and spiritual descendants (Galatians 3:29).

Jacob: A Promise Fulfilled Beyond the Grave

As Jacob prepared to go down to Egypt near the end of his life, God reassured him with a promise:

"I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you back."

— Genesis 46:3–4a, NASB

But Jacob died in Egypt (Genesis 49:33). His body was carried back to Canaan and buried in the family tomb (Genesis 50:13), yet Jacob himself did not return to live in the land. At first glance, it might seem as though this promise was unfulfilled.

And yet, the God who spoke those words to Jacob was not speaking only of earthly geography. In Christ, all the faithful—including Jacob—will rise and dwell in the true Promised Land: the renewed creation, the eternal home of God's people.

Jesus highlights this very point when He responds to the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection. Quoting from Exodus, Jesus says:

"'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

— Matthew 22:32, NASB

In this simple yet profound statement, Jesus affirms that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob still live—and that God's promises to them are not extinguished by death. God's faithfulness transcends time. His covenants are eternal.

Other Examples of Deferred Fulfillment

Scripture is full of promises whose ultimate fulfillment lies beyond this present life:

- David was promised an eternal kingdom through his descendant (2 Samuel 7:16), a promise ultimately fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah (Luke 1:32–33).

- The prophets spoke of a day when justice and peace would reign, when swords would be turned into plowshares (Isaiah 2:4). We await this day even now, knowing it will come fully in the reign of Christ.

- Paul himself endured beatings, imprisonment, and rejection, yet declared:

"For our momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."

— 2 Corinthians 4:17, NASB

The Blessing of Eternal Promises

It might seem disappointing at first that some of God's promises are not fulfilled in this life. But in truth, it is a greater blessing. Temporary blessings fade. Health declines. Wealth withers. Human kingdoms fall. But the promises of God endure forever.

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever."

— Isaiah 40:8, NASB

This means that what we are waiting for is not fragile or fleeting. Our inheritance is:

"…imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you."

— 1 Peter 1:4, NASB

When we understand that God is not limited by time, we gain a new perspective. We learn to live with patience and perseverance, confident that what He has promised, He will do—even if not yet.

Hope That Strengthens Us

This eternal perspective gives us strength to endure hardship. Hope is not wishful thinking—it is anchored in the character of God and the certainty of His Word.

"For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?"

— Romans 8:24, NASB

We may not always understand God's timing. But like Abraham, Jacob, and the great cloud of witnesses before us, we can walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). We trust that God's promises are not late; they are eternal.

Conclusion: Living in Light of Eternity

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not bound by time. His promises are not confined to earthly lifespans or human limitations. And that's good news—because it means His blessings are not just for the present moment but for all eternity.

When we fix our eyes on what is unseen, when we trust in the God who is outside of time, we find a peace that surpasses understanding and a hope that strengthens us to endure. We live with confidence that every promise He has made will come true—perhaps not today, but certainly forever.

"Let us hold firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful."

— Hebrews 10:23, NASB

So let us walk as people of hope, people who believe not just in promises for today, but in promises that stretch into eternity. Because our God is not the God of the dead—but of the living. And in Him, every promise finds its yes and amen (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Mercy, Demons, and Divine Wisdom: Lessons from the Gadarene Demoniac

Mark 5:1–20; Luke 8:26–39; Mark 6:53–56

There are moments in Scripture that leave us scratching our heads, not because we doubt God's goodness, but because His ways stretch far beyond our understanding. One such moment is found in the account of the Gadarene demoniac—a man tormented by a legion of demons until he encounters Jesus and is gloriously set free.

The scene is dramatic. Jesus arrives in the region of the Gerasenes (also called the Gadarenes), and immediately this man—naked, wild, living among the tombs—comes running. The demonic oppression is so fierce that chains could not restrain him. Night and day, he cried out and gashed himself with stones (Mark 5:5). It's a picture of absolute spiritual devastation.

But when Jesus speaks, the demons are terrified. In Luke's version, they "were imploring Him not to command them to go away into the abyss" (Luke 8:31, NASB). Instead, they beg to be sent into a nearby herd of pigs. And Jesus agrees.

This is where I find myself troubled.

Jesus showed mercy—even to the demons.

Why not send them into the abyss? Why not take these malevolent beings off the field of battle entirely? Wouldn't that spare future victims from their influence?

This story raises a deep question: Why does God sometimes show mercy to those we would rather see judged?

Yet at the same time, I know this: I never want Him to withhold mercy from me when I cry out for it. I am daily dependent on His compassion, not because I deserve it, but because He is good.

But the story doesn't end there. The man, now in his right mind, begs to go with Jesus. Who wouldn't? After a life of torment, the one who rescued him is sailing away. But again, Jesus does the unexpected. He says no.

“Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.” (Mark 5:19, NASB)

Instead of joining Jesus, he becomes the first missionary to the Gentile region of the Decapolis.

At first glance, that may seem like a lesser gift.

Why not let him stay in the presence of the one who healed him?

Why not reward his faith with closeness?

But when we read just a chapter later, something remarkable happens.

In Mark 6:53–56, Jesus returns to this region. This is His second visit. And what does He find? Not wild-eyed fear or rejection. This time, the people recognize Him. They run through the entire region, bringing the sick on mats. Wherever He goes—villages, cities, countryside—they beg Him to heal. And He does.

Could it be that the formerly demon-possessed man did exactly what Jesus asked? Could it be that his testimony—so unlikely, so compelling—softened the hearts of his neighbors? That the one who was once feared became a bridge for many to meet the Savior?

And here’s where my earlier trouble finds resolution.

Maybe, just maybe, Jesus’ mercy to the demons was not weakness or indifference. Maybe it was part of a larger plan. What if those very demons—now disembodied again after the pigs drowned—went on to oppress others in the region? What if the people who had once dismissed Jesus now found themselves desperate, afflicted, and open to healing?

It’s impossible to know for sure. But we do know this: the result of Jesus’ two surprising decisions—sparing the demons, and sending the man away—was a great harvest. Many came to Him. Many were healed. And God was glorified.

This challenges me.

It challenges my sense of justice.

It challenges my assumptions about what mercy should look like.

It challenges my desire to always understand what God is doing in the moment.

But it also comforts me.

Because it means that even when I don't see the full picture—when God's choices puzzle me or even seem troubling—He is still working wisely and purposefully. The same Jesus who calmed the storm, cast out demons, and brought peace to a tortured soul, is orchestrating events for the good of many and for the glory of the Father.

Paul writes in Romans 11:33:

"Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (NASB)

That certainly fits here.

So what can we take away from this strange and powerful encounter?

1. Jesus' mercy is wider than ours.

He shows compassion even where we would not. That doesn't mean evil goes unchecked—but it does mean God's mercy serves His purposes, not our preferences.

2. Testimony matters.

The man set free became a messenger of freedom. His past didn't disqualify him—it empowered him. Your story can be the seed that leads others to Christ.

3. God's no is sometimes a greater yes.

The man wanted to follow Jesus physically, but was sent out with a mission. That "no" led to the transformation of a whole region. When God says no to us, it's often because He is saying yes to a bigger plan.

4. God's timing is perfect.

From the first encounter to the second visit, we see the ripple effects of God's grace unfold over time. Just because you don't see immediate fruit doesn't mean your obedience was wasted.

In a world where darkness still lingers, and the enemy still prowls, we can take comfort in knowing this: Jesus has authority. Over storms. Over sickness. Over demons. Over death. And even when His choices confuse us, His wisdom is perfect.

So let us trust Him.

Let us tell our stories.

And let us welcome the hurting—knowing that, through mercy and mystery alike, Jesus is still drawing people to Himself.

Expanding the Box: Growing in Our Understanding of God

One of the subtle but profound struggles we face as believers is this: We are trying to comprehend the incomprehensible. We long to know and understand God, to follow Him with our whole heart, yet we are limited. As finite creatures, we cannot fully grasp the infinite God. And so, whether we realize it or not, each of us "puts God in a box."

Now, to be clear, God Himself is never truly confined by our limitations. But our conception of God—what we believe about Him, how we imagine His power, love, justice, mercy, and involvement in our lives—is often too small. It is limited by our experiences, our traditions, our intellect, and sometimes our fear.

But here's the beautiful part of the Christian journey: a life of following Jesus is, in many ways, a life of growing in the knowledge of God. It's the process of steadily enlarging that "box"—learning to see more of who He is, marveling at His greatness, and allowing that expanding understanding to transform who we are.

Jairus: When the Box Gets Taller

Consider Jairus, the synagogue official whose story is told in Mark 5. He came to Jesus with great faith, believing that the Lord could heal his daughter who was "at the point of death" (Mark 5:23, NASB). That's a bold move—especially for someone in a religious leadership position who might have faced scorn for seeking out Jesus.

But when his servants came and told him, "Your daughter has died; why bother the Teacher further?" (Mark 5:35), his heart surely sank. Healing the sick? Yes. But raising the dead? That wasn't in Jairus' "box" yet.

Jesus, seeing the fear in his eyes, responded, "Do not be afraid, only believe" (v. 36). And then Jesus did the unimaginable—He took the girl by the hand and said, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!" and she got up and began to walk (v. 41–42). Jairus' understanding of who Jesus is and what He is capable of just grew taller. The "height" of his box had been lifted.

Peter: When the Box Gets Wider

Another example appears in Acts 10, when the Apostle Peter receives a puzzling vision. A sheet descends from heaven filled with all kinds of animals, including those considered unclean according to Jewish law. A voice tells him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!" (Acts 10:13). Peter protests—he has never eaten anything unholy or unclean. But God replies, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy" (v. 15).

Peter's vision wasn't just about food—it was about people. Soon afterward, he is called to visit Cornelius, a Roman centurion and a Gentile. By the end of the encounter, Peter proclaims:

"I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him." (Acts 10:34–35, NASB)

The width of Peter's box expanded. He began to grasp more of the breadth of God's love—one that extends across ethnic, cultural, and religious boundaries.

The Crowd: When the Box Gets Deeper

During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said something astounding:

"But even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not fear; you are more valuable than a great number of sparrows." (Matthew 10:30–31, NASB)

To the crowds listening—ordinary people, often overlooked—this was radical. That God knows even the smallest detail about their lives? That He cares so intimately and personally? The depth of their understanding of God was being stretched. He is not just powerful and just—He is near. Attentive. Tender.

Enlarging the Box: A Lifelong Journey

These stories—and many others like them—remind us that our view of God matters deeply. A.W. Tozer famously said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."

If we view God as distant, we will live with anxiety and self-reliance.

If we think He is limited, we will live with diminished faith.

If we believe He is uninterested in the details of our lives, we will struggle to bring our whole selves before Him.

But when our view of God grows, we grow.

Our prayers become bolder.

Our obedience becomes deeper.

Our hope becomes stronger.

Could Our Future Joy Be Linked to This?

Here's a final, speculative thought—one that's not a doctrine, but a possibility worth pondering.

Scripture teaches that there will be differing levels of reward in the next life. Jesus spoke of this in parables (e.g., Luke 19:11–27), and Paul wrote:

"Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, each one's work will become evident… If anyone's work remains, which he has built on it, he will receive a reward." (1 Corinthians 3:12–14, NASB)

We also know that eternal life is described as knowing God:

"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (John 17:3, NASB)

What if the extent to which we can enjoy God in eternity—our ability to fully appreciate His glory—is shaped in part by how well we come to know Him now? What if the process of enlarging our "box" in this life doesn't end with greater understanding alone, but also prepares us for deeper worship, richer fellowship, and fuller joy in the age to come?

Again, this is not a doctrine, but a wonder-filled possibility. At the very least, we know that drawing closer to God now is always worth it—both for this life and the one to come.

Conclusion: Keep Enlarging the Box

You will never outgrow the need to grow in your understanding of God. That's not discouraging—it's liberating. There is always more to discover, always more to be amazed by, always more to love. And as we grow, our lives will be increasingly shaped by the One who is beyond all we can ask or imagine.

So ask the Lord to help you enlarge the box—

Grow in height: trust Him for greater things.

Grow in width: embrace the wideness of His love.

Grow in depth: receive His intimate care.

And as you do, may your life reflect the greatness of the God who cannot be boxed in.

The Ark of the Covenant: A Trinitarian and Messianic Portrait

Throughout Scripture, the Ark of the Covenant stands as a powerful symbol of the presence of God among His people. It was the centerpiece of the Tabernacle, the place where God's glory dwelled, and the very location from which He communed with Moses (Exodus 25:22). Contained within the Ark were three sacred objects: the tablets of the Law, a golden jar of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded (Hebrews 9:4). Each of these items held deep significance in Israel's history, but when viewed through the lens of the New Testament, they also reveal a rich tapestry of theological truth about the Triune God and the multifaceted roles of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King.

The Ark not only represented God's presence, but it did so in a way that pointed toward His fullness—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The inclusion of all three objects was not incidental. Taken together, they paint a picture of the completeness of God's nature and ministry. Leaving out any one of them would diminish the representation of His presence. Let's explore the symbolism and its implications for our faith today.

1. The Tablets of the Law — The Word and the Son (Prophet)

The stone tablets, engraved by the finger of God and given to Moses on Mount Sinai, represent God's covenant with His people and His righteous standard (Exodus 31:18). They point us to Jesus, the Word made flesh (John 1:14), who perfectly fulfilled the Law and proclaimed the will of God. As the ultimate Prophet, Jesus didn't merely speak God's words—He *was* the Word (John 1:1). Moses prophesied that God would raise up a Prophet like himself from among the people, and the New Testament affirms that this was fulfilled in Christ (Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 3:22).

The Law reveals sin, but Jesus brings both the fulfillment of the Law and the grace to overcome its condemnation. In His prophetic role, He teaches, convicts, and reveals the character of the Father. He speaks truth and brings light, calling people to repentance and faith.

2. The Jar of Manna — The Father's Provision (Priest)

The golden jar of manna recalled God's miraculous provision for Israel in the wilderness—a daily supply that sustained them for forty years (Exodus 16:33). In the New Testament, Jesus identifies Himself as the true bread from heaven:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world." (John 6:32–33, NASB)

Though Jesus is speaking of Himself, He attributes the giving of the bread to *His Father*. This act of provision aligns closely with the priestly role—mediating between God and man, offering sustenance and intercession. God the Father, as the source of all good gifts (James 1:17), provided both the manna in the wilderness and the Living Bread in Christ.

The priestly ministry is about access to God, atonement, and sustenance. It is God the Father who sent the Son, who upholds and sustains His people by His grace, and who remains faithful in daily provision.

3. Aaron's Budding Rod — The Spirit's Life-Giving Power (King)

Aaron's rod, which miraculously budded, blossomed, and bore almonds overnight (Numbers 17:8), served as a divine confirmation of God's chosen priestly authority. However, this sign of supernatural life bursting forth from a dead staff can also be seen as symbolic of resurrection and divine appointment.

This imagery aligns beautifully with the Holy Spirit, who gives life, anoints, and empowers. The Spirit raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11), brings about spiritual rebirth in believers (John 3:5–8), and anoints the Messiah as King (Isaiah 11:1–2). The Spirit's presence is the evidence of God's active reign, bringing life where there was none and confirming divine authority.

Furthermore, the role of the King is tied not just to authority, but to *life-giving leadership*. Jesus is the anointed King—"the Christ"—and it is through the Spirit that His kingship is made manifest in power, righteousness, and renewal.

A Trinitarian Presence in the Ark

Seen through this lens, the Ark of the Covenant wasn't merely a box of historical memorabilia; it was a theological masterpiece. Its contents portrayed the fullness of God's character and roles:

- **Tablets of the Law** – The Son, Prophet, Revealer of Truth
- **Manna in the Jar** – The Father, Priest, Provider of Sustenance
- **Aaron's Budding Rod** – The Spirit, King, Giver of Life and Authority

Each Person of the Trinity is reflected. Each role of Christ—Prophet, Priest, and King—is foreshadowed. If even one of these elements were missing, the portrait would be incomplete. God's presence with His people is not partial; it is whole, encompassing every need, every function, every facet of who He is.

The Mercy Seat: A Covering of Grace

It's worth noting that these three sacred items were hidden inside the Ark, covered by the Mercy Seat—the place of atonement (Exodus 25:17–22). Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would sprinkle blood on this golden lid to cover the sins of the people (Leviticus 16:14–15). This was the place where God met with His people—not through the Law, or provision, or leadership alone, but through *atonement*.

In Jesus, the fulfillment of all these elements converges. As Paul wrote:

"...whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith." (Romans 3:25, NASB)

Jesus is our true Ark—God's presence with us in the flesh (Matthew 1:23). He is the Prophet who speaks truth, the Priest who offers Himself, and the King who reigns forever. He embodies the fullness of the Trinity and brings us into communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Complete Presence of God

When the Ark led the Israelites, they followed not just a symbol, but a shadow of the Triune God. It wasn't enough for the Law alone to be present. Provision and life-giving authority were essential. In the same way, a full experience of God's presence today requires that we embrace the Triune nature of our Lord.

To know the Father's provision, the Son's truth, and the Spirit's power is to know God as He truly is.

And to follow Jesus—Prophet, Priest, and King—is to walk in the light of His complete presence.

Takeaway: The Ark of the Covenant was more than sacred furniture—it was a profound foreshadowing of God's eternal plan. It bore witness to the unity and diversity of the Godhead, and to the fullness of Christ's ministry. Let us worship God not in part, but in His wholeness: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—our Prophet, our Priest, and our King.

Pillar of Fire, Cloud of Glory: Following God's Presence, Not Just Principles

When God led the Israelites out of Egypt, He did so with unmistakable clarity. His presence was visible, constant, and dynamic—a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. This supernatural display wasn't just a navigational aid; it was a symbol of His unfailing presence and guidance.

"And the Lord was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. He did not withdraw the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from being in front of the people."
(Exodus 13:21–22, NASB)

This pillar was a visible assurance that God Himself was with them—not merely giving general directions from a distance, but leading them step by step. It's a striking reminder that the journey of faith isn't merely about following biblical *principles* or even replicating *precedents*. It's about following *a Person*. God's people are not called to walk by formula but by fellowship.

More Than Principles

Certainly, God gives us broad principles to live by: justice, mercy, humility, holiness, love. These are foundational and unchanging. Yet, even with a firm understanding of God's character and His Word, we must still be attentive to His *specific* leading in each moment.

The Israelites could not assume that yesterday's movement of the pillar would be today's path. If the cloud stayed, they stayed. If it moved, they moved. They camped and journeyed according to the presence of the Lord, not according to their plans or prior patterns.

"Whether it was two days, a month, or a year that the cloud lingered over the tabernacle, staying above it, the sons of Israel would camp and not set out; but when it was lifted, they would set out."
(Numbers 9:22, NASB)

This teaches us a crucial truth: *obedience requires attentiveness to God's active presence*. His guidance is relational and moment-by-moment. If we only rely on past experiences or general principles, we risk either lagging behind or running ahead.

Contrasting Instructions: Go Forward or Stand Still?

One illustration of this truth comes in Exodus 14. The Israelites are trapped between the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army. The people panic and cry out to the Lord. But God responds in a surprising way:

"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward.'"
(Exodus 14:15, NASB)

In this case, prayer was not the right response—*action* was. God had already revealed the direction. The time had come to obey, not to deliberate. Moses was told to stretch out his staff, and the people were commanded to step forward into the sea.

Contrast this with 2 Chronicles 20. When King Jehoshaphat and Judah faced a massive enemy coalition, they cried out to God. The Lord replied:

"You need not fight in this battle; take your position, stand and watch the salvation of the Lord on your behalf…"
(2 Chronicles 20:17a, NASB)

Here, *waiting* was the command. No staff to raise, no sea to cross—just a call to trust and witness God's deliverance.

Both responses were faithful, but each was radically different. Why? Because God's *specific* instruction varied by the circumstance. The same God gave both commands, and both required listening to His voice, not just applying past models.

Other Examples of Personalized Direction

Scripture is full of such instances:

- **David's Battles with the Philistines (2 Samuel 5:17–25):** When the Philistines attacked, David inquired of the Lord. The first time, God said, "Go up." The second time, however, God said, "Circle around behind them...and when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then act." Same enemy, same king, but completely different instructions. Why? Because God doesn't want us relying on strategy—He wants us relying on *Him*.

- **Jesus and His Healing Methods:** Jesus never healed the same way twice. One blind man was healed by a touch, another by mud and washing, another by a word. He was showing us that healing is not a magical formula—it's a personal encounter with the living God.

- **Paul's Missionary Journeys (Acts 16:6–10):** Paul had a heart to preach the gospel, but the Holy Spirit forbid him from going into certain regions at specific times. It wasn't enough that Paul had a good plan—he needed God's guidance on timing and location.

God's Presence is Our Guide

The point is not to abandon wisdom, precedent, or principle. Rather, it's to *layer* them with dependence on God's present voice and leading. The pillar of cloud and fire teaches us that God is not a passive map-maker. He is an active guide.

He leads by His Spirit, moment by moment. Romans 8:14 tells us:

"For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons and daughters of God."
(NASB)

We are called not only to know the Word, but to walk by the Spirit—who applies that Word with perfect timing and insight.

A Daily Dependence

Just as the Israelites depended daily on the movement of the pillar, we are called to daily seek God's direction. It requires humility. It requires listening. Sometimes He

says “move,” sometimes “wait.” Sometimes the seas part, other times He says “watch.” In every case, His presence is both our comfort and our command.

The pillar of fire and cloud was a visible symbol, but now, under the new covenant, we have something even better: the indwelling Holy Spirit. We are not just *following* the presence of God—we are *filled* with Him.

“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, so that He may be with you forever; the Helper is the Spirit of truth… you know Him because He remains with you and will be in you.”
(John 14:16–17, NASB)

Conclusion: Follow the Cloud

In a world that craves certainty and formulas, God invites us into relationship. His Word gives us truth. His Spirit gives us guidance. But both require us to walk with Him daily—not just consulting a map, but listening for His voice.

So let us be people who don’t simply apply principles or mimic past victories. Let us be people of the pillar—those who walk when He moves and wait when He tarries. Let us follow the fire, follow the cloud, and above all, follow Him.

Marked by His Presence: When People Know We've Been with God

There's something unmistakable about a person who has been with God.

In *Exodus 34:29-30*, we read that *"it came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai… that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him. So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to approach him."*

Moses didn't try to look different. He didn't put on a glowing mask or coat himself in glory. The radiance of his face was simply a byproduct of having been in the presence of God. And even more remarkably, Moses himself was unaware of it. It wasn't something he tried to project—it was something others could not help but notice.

That's the essence of true transformation. When we spend time with God—real, intentional, surrendered time—it marks us. It changes us. And that change is often visible, not because we're trying to impress others with our spiritual stature, but because the presence of the Lord is that powerful.

A Radiance the World Can't Replicate

Moses' glowing face is an extreme example, but the same principle is seen throughout Scripture. In *Acts 4:13*, after Peter and John had boldly testified about Jesus to the Sanhedrin, we're told:
"Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and they began to recognize them as having been with Jesus."

Their education didn't convince the leaders. Their eloquence didn't sway them. But their courage, their clarity, and the unmistakable presence of Jesus shining through their lives—that was undeniable. The religious leaders could not explain their boldness any other way. These men had been with Jesus.

From Fearful to Fearless

That transformation is powerful. Consider Peter again. Before the crucifixion, Peter denied Jesus three times. He was terrified of being associated with Him. But after

the resurrection—and after the coming of the Holy Spirit—he stood boldly before crowds and councils, proclaiming Christ without hesitation.

The difference? He had not only *been with* Jesus physically—he was now *filled with* the Spirit of God. And the presence of God radiated from him, not in beams of light, but in courage, conviction, and clarity.

Joseph in Egypt

In *Genesis 39*, we're told repeatedly that *"the Lord was with Joseph."* Whether as a slave in Potiphar's house or a prisoner in Pharaoh's dungeon, there was something unmistakably different about Joseph. Potiphar noticed it. The prison warden noticed it. Pharaoh noticed it.

After Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams and laid out a plan of wisdom for saving Egypt from famine, Pharaoh declared,
"Can we find a man like this, in whom there is a divine spirit?" (Genesis 41:38, NASB).

Even a pagan ruler could recognize God's presence in Joseph. He didn't have theological language for it, but he knew there was something sacred, something other-worldly about Joseph's demeanor, wisdom, and integrity.

Stephen's Glowing Face

Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was also visibly marked by God's presence. As he gave his defense before the council in *Acts 6*, we read:
"And fixing their eyes on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15, NASB).

It wasn't just his eloquence or his Scripture-filled speech. There was a *glory* about him. A reflection of the One he served. Even in the moments before his death, Stephen radiated heaven.

The Scent of Christ

Paul puts it another way in 2 Corinthians 2:14-15:
"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests

through us the aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing."

There is an *aroma* to a life lived in Christ. Just as a person who spends time in a bakery carries the smell of fresh bread, or someone who has been near a campfire carries the scent of smoke, a person who has spent time in God's presence carries His fragrance.

It may convict some. It may draw others. But it is unmistakable.

Jesus' Time in Prayer

Even Jesus modeled this. Though He was God incarnate, He constantly withdrew to be alone with the Father. Luke 5:16 tells us, *"But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray."*

And what happened when He returned? He healed the sick. He cast out demons. He taught with authority. Power flowed from His time in the Father's presence.

In Luke 9, after Jesus had gone up a mountain to pray, He returned and immediately healed a demon-possessed boy whom His disciples had been unable to help. The Father's presence prepared Him for the task.

What About Us?

This isn't just for Moses, Peter, or Stephen. This is for us. We, too, can live lives marked by His presence. Jesus made a way for us to boldly approach the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16). And as we do, we are changed.

Paul writes in *2 Corinthians 3:18*,
"But we all, with unveiled faces, looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory…"

The more we behold Him, the more we become like Him.

Let Them See Him in You

We live in a world desperate for something real. People are tired of empty religion and performative spirituality. But when someone walks into a room filled with peace, love, and quiet strength—and that someone has clearly been with God—it speaks louder than any sermon.

May we be those people.

May we be like Moses, who glowed from the mountain.
Like Peter and John, bold and unshaken.
Like Joseph, wise and upright.
Like Stephen, radiant even in death.
Like Jesus, who flowed with power because He spent time in prayer.

And may it be said of us—not because of our credentials, charisma, or accomplishments—but because of our quiet, Spirit-shaped lives:

"They have been with Jesus."

"Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John… they were amazed, and they began to recognize them as having been with Jesus."
— Acts 4:13, NASB

Awe and Intimacy: Holding the Tension in Our Walk with God

There's a beautiful, sacred tension at the heart of our relationship with God—one that requires us to walk both closely *and* carefully with Him.

On one hand, we are invited to draw near. Jesus calls us friends (John 15:15). The Spirit enables us to cry out, "Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:15, NASB). We are adopted as beloved sons and daughters. We are no longer strangers but heirs. This is no cold religion. It is a warm, personal, intimate relationship with the living God.

And yet…
This same God is the One before whom angels hide their faces (Isaiah 6:2), who dwells in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16), and whose presence caused the earth to quake and the mountains to melt like wax (Psalm 97:5). He is not merely a comforting presence; He is the consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29).

To walk rightly with God is to live in the tension between *awe* and *intimacy*—not choosing one over the other, but embracing both fully.

The Problem of Over-Familiarity

In many Christian circles today, we hear a needed and welcome emphasis on the nearness of God. He is our Father. Jesus is our Brother. The Holy Spirit is our Helper and Comforter. These are glorious truths that reflect the kindness and accessibility of God through Christ. But if we are not careful, we may swing the pendulum too far.

There is a danger in being *too* casual—treating God like a buddy rather than the Sovereign King of the universe. While God welcomes our closeness, He is not our peer. He is infinitely holy, infinitely powerful, infinitely wise.

When we downplay this aspect of His nature, we rob Him of honor and rob ourselves of wonder.

Awe Is Not Old Covenant Only

Some mistakenly assume that awe and reverence were Old Testament realities, rendered obsolete by grace. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In *Acts 2:43*, after the Spirit was poured out and the church was born, we read:
"*Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles*."

The early believers, filled with the Holy Spirit and walking in intimate fellowship with God, still felt a deep, abiding sense of awe. They had not lost the fear of the Lord—they had found it in its proper place, alongside love and joy and nearness.

Later in *Hebrews 12:28-29*, the writer urges us:
"*Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let's show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire*."

This is New Testament theology. New Covenant worship. Awe is still very much in order.

Jesus: Intimate and Awesome

Jesus Himself embodies this holy tension. He welcomed children into His arms, dined with sinners, and washed the feet of His disciples. But He also walked on water, silenced storms, cast out demons, and radiated divine glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. His very presence inspired both *closeness* and *trembling*.

When John, the disciple Jesus loved—the one who reclined on His chest at the Last Supper—saw Him glorified in *Revelation 1:17*, he wrote:
"*When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man*."

John knew Jesus intimately. Yet when he saw Him in His glory, awe overwhelmed him.

Biblical Balance: Examples of the Tension

The Bible is full of those who walked in this balance.

- **Abraham** spoke with God as a friend (James 2:23) yet fell on his face in reverence (Genesis 17:3).
- **Moses** spoke with God "face to face" (Exodus 33:11), yet dared not look directly at His glory.
- **Isaiah**, already a prophet, cried "Woe is me!" when he saw the Lord exalted (Isaiah 6:5).
- **Peter**, after witnessing the miraculous catch of fish, fell down at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8).

These were not men without relationship. These were men *marked* by relationship. And that intimacy deepened their reverence.

Why Reverence Matters Today

Without awe, worship becomes casual and shallow.
Without intimacy, worship becomes distant and cold.

We need both.

Reverence keeps us humble, reminding us of God's greatness and our dependence on Him. It guards against flippancy, spiritual pride, and self-reliance. It fuels gratitude and holy fear.

Intimacy draws us near, reminding us of His love and faithfulness. It invites us into personal communion, to speak, listen, and walk with our Creator.

Together, awe and intimacy form a healthy rhythm—like breathing in and out. One without the other leaves our spiritual lives gasping for balance.

Learning the Posture of Both

So how do we cultivate this sacred tension?

1. **Spend time in Scripture**
   Let the Word, rather than your culture or comfort, shape your view of God. Read both the gentleness and the majesty. Don't skip the burning bush, the thunder on Sinai, or the throne room in Revelation.

2. **Approach prayer with both heart and head bowed**
   Pour out your heart to God, but don't forget to pause and listen. Begin your prayers with praise. Let adoration precede your requests.

3. **Worship with your whole being**
   Sometimes the most reverent thing we can do is sing with abandon. Sometimes it's to kneel in silence. Ask the Spirit to lead your worship—not only in emotion, but in truth (John 4:24).

4. **Surround yourself with others who revere the Lord**
   Fellowship with believers who take God seriously will fan the flames of awe in your own life. The early church grew in both favor and *fear of the Lord* (Acts 9:31).

5. **Remember the Cross**
   The cross is the ultimate display of both awe and intimacy. It is the holy judgment of sin and the tender embrace of grace, forever intertwined. Never lose your wonder at Calvary.

Final Thoughts

The God who holds the universe together also numbers the hairs on your head.
The One who dwells in unapproachable light also invites you to call Him "Abba."

He is both infinitely *near* and overwhelmingly *other*.

Let us not settle for a one-dimensional faith. Let us walk in the fullness of relationship—drawing near in trust, and bowing low in reverence. It is not either/or. It is both/and.

For only then will we begin to know Him truly…
The God who is both our *Father* and our *King*,
our *Friend* and our *Fire*,
our *Comforter* and our *Crown*.

One God in Three Persons: Biblical Evidence for the Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most foundational—and most mysterious—truths of the Christian faith. It declares that there is *one God*, eternally existent in *three Persons*: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each is fully God, co-eternal and co-equal, yet distinct in personhood.

While the word "Trinity" does not appear in Scripture, the concept is revealed throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Far from being a theological invention, the Trinitarian nature of God emerges from the text as we behold how God reveals Himself in word and action.

Let's explore the biblical evidence for the Trinity, grounded in the truth that *"the LORD our God, the LORD is one"*(Deuteronomy 6:4, NASB), yet revealed in three divine Persons.

1. The Triune God in Creation

From the very beginning of Scripture, we see hints of God's complex unity:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth… And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters."
— Genesis 1:1–2, NASB

Here, **God** is the Creator, and **the Spirit** is actively present.

Then in *Genesis 1:26*, we read:

"Then God said, 'Let Us make mankind in Our image, according to Our likeness.'"

The plural language—*"Us"* and *"Our"*—has long puzzled interpreters. While some claim it is merely a royal plural, the weight of progressive revelation shows it to be an early hint of the Trinity. This plural language reappears at key moments (e.g., Genesis 3:22; 11:7; Isaiah 6:8).

John 1:1–3 confirms the Trinitarian presence at creation:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God… All things came into being through Him…"

This "Word" is Jesus, the eternal Son, present and active in creation alongside the Father and the Spirit.

2. The Trinity in Jesus' Baptism

At the baptism of Jesus, we see a rare moment where all three Persons of the Trinity are manifest at once:

"After He was baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water… and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and settling on Him, and behold, a voice from the heavens said, 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'"
— Matthew 3:16–17, NASB

Here is **Jesus the Son**, **the Spirit descending**, and **the Father speaking**—distinct, yet united in divine purpose. It is a powerful picture of God's triune nature revealed in one scene.

3. The Trinitarian Formula in the Great Commission

Jesus explicitly affirms the Trinity in His commission to His disciples:

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit…"
— Matthew 28:19, NASB

Not *"names,"* but *"name"*—singular. One God, three Persons. This formula is not arbitrary; it reflects the divine reality into which we are baptized. It shows us the unity and equality of Father, Son, and Spirit.

4. Paul's Trinitarian Benedictions

Throughout his letters, Paul frequently expresses Trinitarian truths in his greetings and blessings:

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."
— 2 Corinthians 13:14, NASB

Each Person is mentioned with a distinct role—**grace** from the Son, **love** from the Father, **fellowship** through the Spirit. Yet Paul offers this blessing in one seamless statement, showing the unity of the Godhead.

Similarly, in *Ephesians 4:4–6*, Paul speaks of:

- **One Spirit** (v.4)
- **One Lord [Jesus]** (v.5)
- **One God and Father of all** (v.6)

This triadic structure is not accidental. It is intentional and theological.

5. Jesus' Teachings About the Trinity

Jesus regularly referred to the Father and the Spirit in ways that show distinct persons acting in perfect harmony. Consider:

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things…"
— John 14:26, NASB

Here we see:

- **The Son** speaking,
- **The Father** sending,
- **The Spirit** coming.

In *John 15:26*, Jesus says:

"When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father—He will testify about Me."

Distinct Persons. Shared essence. United mission.

6. The Trinity in Salvation

Each Person of the Trinity plays a role in our redemption:

- **The Father** chooses and sends the Son (*Ephesians 1:4–5*)
- **The Son** redeems through His death and resurrection (*Ephesians 1:7*)
- **The Spirit** seals and indwells believers (*Ephesians 1:13–14*)

Peter echoes this in *1 Peter 1:2*:

"…according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood…"

This isn't dry theology—this is the heartbeat of our salvation.

7. Embracing the Mystery

At the heart of the Trinity lies a mystery deeper than human reason can fully comprehend. How can God be one in essence and yet exist eternally in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? The Bible doesn't give us a philosophical treatise, but it does give us a window into this mystery—especially in the words of Jesus Himself.

In *John 17*, often called the "High Priestly Prayer," Jesus offers an extraordinary glimpse into the inner life of the Triune God. He speaks not only of His mission on earth, but of His eternal relationship with the Father and His desire to draw His followers into that divine fellowship.

"Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world existed."
— John 17:5, NASB

Here Jesus speaks of a pre-existent glory—a shared divine splendor that predates creation. The Son was not created; He is eternal, existing in perfect communion with the Father. The relationship within the Godhead is not hierarchical but harmonious. Glory is shared.

Later, Jesus prays:

"I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom You have given Me… so that they may all be one; just as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us… The glory which You have given Me I also have given to them, so that they may be one, just as We are one."
— John 17:9, 21–22, NASB

In these verses, we see something staggering: the unity between Father and Son becomes the model—and the means—for our unity with God and with one another. Jesus prays that His followers would be drawn into the same divine oneness that exists within the Trinity. That is not a metaphor. That is reality. We are invited into participation with the triune life of God.

This is no cold or detached mystery. It is a *relational* one—a holy invitation into eternal love. The unity of the Trinity isn't mere cooperation; it is perfect, self-giving, eternal love between distinct Persons. And that love spills outward to include us.

"Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory, which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."
— John 17:24, NASB

This verse reminds us that love has always existed—not just between God and humanity, but within God Himself. Before the world was made, the Father loved the Son. That love is not secondary to God's nature; it is central. And through Christ, we are welcomed into the eternal relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit.

To embrace the Trinity is to embrace mystery, yes—but also to embrace relationship. The God who is beyond us has chosen to dwell *with* us and *within* us.

We cannot fully explain it, but we can fully worship.
We cannot completely comprehend it, but we can completely surrender.

And in doing so, we echo the unity, the love, and the joy of the eternal Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—*one God, now and forever*.

Final Thoughts

The doctrine of the Trinity is not an abstract concept. It is the foundation of our worship, our salvation, and our identity as believers.

We worship **one God**—not three gods—but this one God exists eternally in **three Persons**, each fully divine, working together in perfect unity.

This is the God who made us, saved us, and now lives within us.

May we marvel, not merely at the depth of this mystery, but at the majesty of the Triune God who reveals Himself through Scripture and invites us into eternal fellowship.

"Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of armies,
The whole earth is full of His glory."
— Isaiah 6:3, NASB

When Wisdom Fails: Lessons from Ahithophel's Fall

Text: 2 Samuel 17:23 (NASB)

"Now when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey and arose and went to his home, to his city, and set his house in order, and strangled himself; so he died and was buried in the grave of his father."

Ahithophel was known as one of the wisest men in Israel. Scripture says his counsel "was as if one inquired of the word of God" (2 Samuel 16:23). He was a trusted advisor first to King David, and later, tragically, to Absalom. His words carried immense weight, and his insights were legendary. Yet, despite his brilliance, his story ends in despair, self-destruction, and isolation.

How could a man so gifted with wisdom fall so completely?

Ahithophel's life gives us a sobering reminder that wisdom alone is not enough. It matters how we use it, why we use it, and whether we submit it to God's purposes. Let's look at three lessons from his downfall.

1. Wisdom Is of No Value If It Is Used in Pride

Ahithophel's final act of suicide was not merely a rash reaction to disappointment—it was the tragic fruit of wounded pride. When Absalom rejected his advice in favor of Hushai's (2 Samuel 17:14), Ahithophel felt humiliated. He knew his counsel was superior, and he could foresee that Absalom's rebellion would fail. But instead of humbling himself, repenting of his treachery, or returning to David in contrition, he chose death over disgrace.

At its root, pride made Ahithophel's wisdom worthless. His insight was immense, but his heart was self-exalting. Proverbs 16:18 warns, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling." For Ahithophel, that proverb was not theory—it was biography.

Wisdom wrapped in pride becomes poison. We may appear clever, discerning, or successful, but if our wisdom is used to elevate self rather than God, it will ultimately collapse under its own arrogance. James contrasts this beautifully in the New Testament:

"Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic." (James 3:13-15, NASB)

Ahithophel's pride made him deaf to the "gentleness of wisdom." Instead of using his God-given understanding to bless, he used it to manipulate and destroy. When his plans failed, he could not imagine living without honor or control. His identity was bound not to God's truth but to his own reputation.

A person may possess great intellect, experience, or discernment, but without humility, those gifts become dangerous tools. True wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 9:10)—a humble recognition that He is God, and we are not.

2. Wisdom Is of No Value If It Isn't Heeded

Even the wisest counsel is useless if ignored. Absalom's downfall illustrates this perfectly. When he sought advice about pursuing David, Ahithophel gave him a plan that, militarily speaking, was flawless. But God had other purposes. Scripture says plainly, "The LORD had ordained to thwart the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring calamity on Absalom" (2 Samuel 17:14, NASB).

The Lord overruled human wisdom. Absalom, guided by vanity and insecurity, chose to listen to Hushai instead. In doing so, he sealed his own fate.

There is a broader truth here: Wisdom must be received to bear fruit. Proverbs 1:7 reminds us, "Fools despise wisdom and instruction." The difference between the wise and the foolish is not access to information—it's responsiveness to correction. Many of us have known what was right, even sensed God's whisper urging us toward obedience, but like Absalom, we listened to another voice that told us what we wanted to hear.

Jesus lamented the same pattern in His own day:

"Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand." (Matthew 7:26, NASB)

It is not enough to hear truth. We must build upon it. Wisdom requires obedience. Absalom ignored wise counsel, and Ahithophel despaired when his counsel was ignored. Both perished—not for lack of insight, but for lack of submission to God's will.

Let us be people who not only seek wisdom, but receive it with open hearts. God's Word still speaks; the Spirit still guides; godly mentors still warn and encourage. The question is whether we are humble enough to listen.

3. Wisdom Can Be Used in Service of Good or Evil

Wisdom itself is morally neutral; it is a tool that takes on the character of the heart that wields it. In David's court, Ahithophel's counsel had been a source of stability and strength. But when he turned against David, his brilliance became a weapon of betrayal.

This dual potential of wisdom runs throughout Scripture. The same strategic mind that can save lives can also destroy them. The same eloquence that can proclaim truth can also deceive. Think of Balaam, who possessed spiritual insight yet used it for profit and compromise (Numbers 22–24). Think of Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, who later squandered that wisdom through idolatry and self-indulgence (1 Kings 11:4).

The key is direction. Is our wisdom submitted to the Lord, or used for ourselves?

James 3:17 gives the measuring stick:

"The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy."

When our insight produces purity, peace, gentleness, and mercy, we can be confident it comes from above. But when it feeds pride, conflict, and self-interest, it has drifted far from God's purpose.

Ahithophel's story reminds us that gifts ungoverned by grace become instruments of ruin. He used his intellect to conspire against God's anointed king. Even though his analysis was correct—Absalom's rebellion was doomed—his heart was wrong. Wisdom in the service of evil may succeed temporarily, but it cannot stand against the purposes of God.

Conclusion: Submitting Wisdom to the Lord

Ahithophel's tragedy is not that he lacked wisdom, but that he misused it. He allowed pride to corrupt it, despondency to extinguish it, and rebellion to weaponize it. The result was despair and death.

But the gospel offers a redeeming contrast. The apostle Paul wrote, "The foolishness of God is wiser than mankind, and the weakness of God is stronger than mankind." (1 Corinthians 1:25, NASB). The wisdom of this world often exalts cleverness, success, and self-promotion. God's wisdom exalts humility, surrender, and love.

If Ahithophel's life warns us, Jesus' life invites us. He embodied perfect wisdom—"in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). And yet He humbled Himself, even to the point of death on a cross. Where Ahithophel's pride led to self-destruction, Christ's humility led to resurrection.

So the call for us today is simple:

- Use your wisdom humbly.
- Heed the wisdom God sends you.
- And dedicate your understanding wholly to His glory.

When wisdom bows before the Lord, it becomes not a weapon, but a witness.

The God Who Sees: Living Honestly Before the All-Knowing One

Key Passages

“The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good.” — Proverbs 15:3 (NASB)

“Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord, how much more the hearts of mankind!” — Proverbs 15:11 (NASB)

“All the ways of a person are clean in his own sight, but the Lord examines the motives.” — Proverbs 16:2 (NASB)

There is both comfort and conviction in knowing that God sees everything. Nothing escapes His gaze—no action, no word, no secret thought. That truth can unsettle us when our hearts wander, but it can also bring deep peace when we feel misunderstood or unseen.

These verses from Proverbs remind us that God’s awareness is not distant or detached. He sees the evil and the good. He looks not only at our deeds but at our desires. He weighs not only what we do, but why we do it.

Let’s explore two powerful lessons that flow from these truths.

1. God Sees the Words, Actions, and Motives of Everyone Everywhere

Proverbs 15:3 tells us, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place.” There is no hiding from His presence, no corner of creation where His sight does not reach. King David expressed this same reality in Psalm 139:7-12:

“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.”

We often think of God’s omniscience only in terms of knowledge—He knows everything. But Proverbs pushes us further: God’s sight is personal and moral. He is watching—not as a passive observer, but as a holy and loving Father who cares deeply about what His children do.

That means every conversation, every decision, every motive lies open before Him. Nothing we whisper in secret, nothing we plan in private, is hidden from His eyes. As Hebrews 4:13 puts it:

"And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom we must answer."

For some, that thought feels heavy—like living under constant surveillance. But for the believer who walks with God, it is an invitation to integrity. We do not need to pretend or perform, because we are already fully known.

God sees every act of quiet faithfulness that others overlook. He hears every prayer whispered in tears. He notices every small step of obedience that receives no applause. Jesus said, "Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." (Matthew 6:4, NASB)

So yes—God sees when we sin, but He also sees when we strive to do right. He is not a distant judge waiting to condemn; He is a compassionate Father who searches our hearts for the faintest pulse of repentance and belief.

Knowing that God sees all things calls us to live transparently before Him. It frees us from the exhausting game of appearances. We can live with sincerity, not image management—because we serve the God who sees truly.

2. Everyone Can Justify Their Actions, but God Examines Motives

Proverbs 16:2 captures a truth that pierces human nature:

"All the ways of a person are clean in his own sight, but the Lord examines the motives."

How easily we convince ourselves that we are right! We excuse sharp words because we "meant well." We justify impatience because we "had a good reason." We cloak pride in "confidence," selfishness in "self-care," or compromise in "wisdom."

Jeremiah 17:9 gives the diagnosis:

“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?”

Only God truly can. Jeremiah continues in verse 10:

“I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, to give to each person according to his ways.”

Our self-evaluations are notoriously unreliable. We are masters of self-justification. We can rationalize almost anything if it protects our image or preserves our comfort. But God looks beneath the surface. He sees not just the action but the ambition behind it—the hidden “why” that drives us.

Jesus revealed this same truth when He rebuked the Pharisees. Outwardly, they appeared righteous, but inwardly they were filled with pride and hypocrisy (Matthew 23:27-28). They performed good deeds for public recognition, not for God’s glory. Their motives corrupted their actions.

God does not merely grade us by our outward performance; He weighs the condition of the heart. As 1 Samuel 16:7 reminds us:

“For God sees not as man sees, since man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

That truth calls us to self-examination—not with fear, but with humility. David prayed, “Search me, God, and know my heart; put me to the test and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there is any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.” (Psalm 139:23-24, NASB)

What a courageous prayer that is! David invited the all-seeing God to reveal hidden motives, to expose false righteousness, and to realign his heart with God’s purposes.

When we open our hearts this way, the Spirit gently shows us where pride has crept in, where self-interest has disguised itself as service, or where fear has masked itself as caution. The goal is not condemnation but purification—that our actions may spring from sincere love for God and others.

The Comfort of Being Fully Known

For those who walk in faith, the knowledge that God sees everything is not meant to crush us, but to anchor us. It means our relationship with Him is built on reality, not illusion. We do not have to hide or pretend.

When we stumble, we can confess quickly, knowing He already knows. When we do good and no one notices, we can rest in His approval, knowing He saw.

There is an old saying: "Character is who you are when no one is watching." But the truth for the believer is deeper—someone is always watching, and that Someone loves you perfectly.

The eyes of the Lord are not searching for reasons to condemn, but for hearts that are wholly His.

"For the eyes of the Lord roam throughout the earth, so that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His." (2 Chronicles 16:9, NASB)

Living in the Light

When we remember that God sees both our motives and our actions, we begin to live differently. We stop measuring ourselves by human comparison and start measuring by divine truth. We become more honest in confession, more gracious in judgment, and more intentional in integrity.

Instead of asking, "How do I look to others?" we learn to ask, "How do I appear before God?"

That perspective changes everything. It produces humility, purity, and peace.

So let's live each day aware that God's eyes are upon us—not as a threat, but as a blessing. Let's invite Him to purify our motives, correct our blind spots, and strengthen our desire to please Him in all things.

A Prayer for Today

Father, You see all things—my actions, my words, and even my motives. Thank You that Your gaze is not cold or condemning, but loving and true. Search my heart and show me where I deceive myself. Help me to walk with integrity before You,

to act out of pure love for You, and to find comfort in being fully known and fully loved. May every thought and deed bring honor to Your name. Amen.

The Seven Days of Creation and the Seven Millennia of History

When God created the world, He ordered His work into seven days—six days of activity and one day of rest. Many Christians through history have noticed that these seven days may also serve as a prophetic pattern for the span of human history itself.

The psalmist reminds us: "For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by" (Psalm 90:4). Peter echoes this truth: "With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8). Could it be that the seven days of creation correspond allegorically to seven thousand years of history?

Day 1: Light in the Darkness (4000–3000 B.C.)

God said, "Let there be light." In the first millennium, God's light shone in Eden. But sin quickly plunged humanity into darkness. Even then, God gave a promise of a coming Redeemer—the first glimmer of hope.

Day 2: Separation of Waters (3000–2000 B.C.)

On the second day, God divided the waters. In the second millennium, judgment fell in the form of the Flood, separating the righteous remnant from the corrupt world. Later, at Babel, God scattered the nations, dividing peoples and tongues.

Day 3: Land and Seed (2000–1000 B.C.)

On the third day, land and seed-bearing plants appeared. In the third millennium, God called Abraham, planting the covenant "seed" from which Israel would grow. His people would take root in the Promised Land, preparing the way for Messiah.

Day 4: The Great Light (1000 B.C.–0)

On the fourth day, God made the sun, moon, and stars to give light. In the fourth millennium, the prophets and leaders of Israel served as lesser lights pointing forward. Then, at the fullness of time, the true Light—Jesus Christ—rose into the world.

Day 5: Life in the Seas and Skies (0–1000 A.D.)

On the fifth day, the waters teemed with fish and the skies filled with birds. In the fifth millennium, the Gospel swarmed across nations, as disciples became "fishers of men." The faith spread swiftly, lifted by the Spirit's wind like birds in the heavens.

Day 6: Mankind and Dominion (1000–2000 A.D. → today)

On the sixth day, God created mankind in His image, giving dominion over the earth. The sixth millennium has been marked by human expansion, global dominion, and technology's rise. Yet this dominion has often been twisted into pride and rebellion. Humanity exalts itself, even as the world groans for its true King.

Day 7: The Sabbath Rest (Future: Christ's Reign)

On the seventh day, God rested. Soon, Christ will return to establish His kingdom and reign for a thousand years (Revelation 20:1–6). This will be the great Sabbath rest—the world at peace under its rightful King. After this, eternity unfolds in the new creation—the "eighth day" beyond time itself.

Living in the Transition

If we are indeed standing at the close of the sixth millennium, then history is poised at the edge of the Sabbath rest. Just as God's creation week culminated in rest, so the story of redemption will culminate in the reign of Christ.

For the believer, this is not speculation for curiosity's sake—it is motivation to live in readiness. The same God who ordered creation has ordered history, and His purposes will stand.

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

The Seven Feasts of Israel and Their Fulfillment in Christ

In Leviticus 23, God gave Israel seven appointed feasts. These were not only celebrations of Israel's history but also prophetic shadows pointing to the Messiah. Paul reminds us in Colossians 2:16–17 that the feasts were a 'shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.' In this way, the feasts form a prophetic calendar of redemption, fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Passover (Pesach)

Old Testament Meaning: Commemorates Israel's deliverance from Egypt by the blood of the lamb (Exodus 12; Leviticus 23:5).

Fulfillment: Fulfilled at the Cross. Jesus is the Lamb of God whose blood delivers us from sin and death (John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7).

Unleavened Bread (Chag HaMatzot)

Old Testament Meaning: Seven days of eating bread without leaven, symbolizing separation from sin (Leviticus 23:6-8).

Fulfillment: Fulfilled in Jesus' sinless body in the tomb and in believers' call to holiness (1 Corinthians 5:8).

Firstfruits (Yom HaBikkurim)

Old Testament Meaning: Offering of the first ripe sheaf of the barley harvest (Leviticus 23:9-14).

Fulfillment: Fulfilled in Jesus' resurrection—He is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20).

Pentecost (Shavuot)

Old Testament Meaning: Celebrated the wheat harvest and the giving of the Law at Sinai (Leviticus 23:15-22).

Fulfillment: Fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2) with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, writing God's law on hearts.

Trumpets (Yom Teruah)

Old Testament Meaning: A solemn day of trumpet blasts announcing judgment and repentance (Leviticus 23:23-25).

Fulfillment: To be fulfilled at the Second Coming, when the trumpet of God heralds Christ's return (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

Old Testament Meaning: Annual sacrifice for national sin; the high priest entered the Holy of Holies (Leviticus 23:26-32).

Fulfillment: Fulfilled in Christ's once-for-all sacrifice (Hebrews 9:12). Many see a future fulfillment in Israel's national repentance (Zechariah 12:10).

Tabernacles (Sukkot)

Old Testament Meaning: A joyful feast remembering God's presence with His people in the wilderness (Leviticus 23:33-43).

Fulfillment: To be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom, when Christ tabernacles with humanity (John 1:14; Revelation 21:3).

Observations and Application

The Spring feasts (Passover through Pentecost) were fulfilled in Christ's first coming. The Fall feasts (Trumpets through Tabernacles) point to His second coming and reign. Together, the feasts form a prophetic calendar of redemption: Christ crucified, buried, risen, ascended, returning, atoning, and dwelling with His people.

For the believer, this offers assurance that history is not random. God has ordered it, and all things find their fulfillment in Jesus. Just as the feasts were fulfilled with perfect timing, so too will the remaining feasts be fulfilled in Christ's return.

Cooperative Wisdom and Trust in God's Decision

"So the men went and passed through the land, and wrote a description of it by cities in seven divisions in a book; and they came to Joshua at the camp at Shiloh. Joshua then cast lots for them in Shiloh before the Lord, and there Joshua divided the land for the sons of Israel according to their divisions."
—Joshua 18:9–10 (NASB2020)

The book of Joshua records a fascinating moment in Israel's history. Seven tribes had not yet received their inheritance in the promised land. To address this, Joshua sent three men from each tribe—a total of twenty-one representatives—to travel through the land, carefully describe it, and divide it into seven sections. They then returned to Joshua with their report, and lots were cast before the Lord to determine which tribe would receive which portion.

At first glance, this might seem like a logistical detail, a practical way of settling tribal boundaries. But if we pause and reflect, there are profound lessons here for us about cooperation, trust, humility, and God's sovereign direction.

A Cooperative Task

Notice how the process began: three men from each of the seven tribes worked together. That is twenty-one individuals, each representing a tribe with its own needs, concerns, and expectations. They had to travel through the land, study its geography, weigh its potential, and agree on a plan that divided it fairly. This was not a solitary assignment, nor was it a contest of competing proposals. Instead, it was a cooperative effort.

We are told they "wrote a description of it by cities in seven divisions in a book" (**v. 9**). That meant gathering insights from all twenty-one representatives and weaving them into a single, unified report. Imagine the conversations along the way: "This region has fertile fields." "That one has fortified cities." "Here is a natural boundary that makes sense for division." They had to listen, evaluate, and find consensus. The process itself required patience, humility, and mutual respect.

In our world today, decision-making often takes another form. We tend to appoint a champion for each interest group. Each party develops its own plan, and then the

plans are presented, debated, and defended. The strongest voices, the most persuasive arguments, or the most influential parties often shape the outcome. Compromise becomes the goal, but cooperation is not always the spirit.

How different is the example in Joshua! Instead of rivalry, there was collaboration. Instead of competition, there was complementarity. Twenty-one men worked together not to push their tribe's interests but to create a shared vision of the land God had given.

God Decides the Outcome

After the divisions were recorded, Joshua did not simply assign them. He did not rely on his wisdom or allow the tribes to negotiate among themselves. Instead, "Joshua then cast lots for them in Shiloh before the Lord" (**v. 10**). The final decision rested not with the men but with God.

This process is reminiscent of the ancient method of dividing food between two people: one person cuts, and the other chooses. The fairness comes not from self-interest but from accountability. In Joshua's case, the accountability was ultimate—the Lord Himself determined the distribution by lot. The representatives divided the land, but God assigned the portions.

This balance is striking. Human responsibility and cooperation prepared the way, but divine sovereignty made the final decision. Both were essential. Without the careful survey and description, the lots could not have been cast. But without God's decision, the process would have been open to strife.

For us, this is a reminder that while God calls us to use wisdom, to plan diligently, and to work together, we must ultimately entrust outcomes to Him. "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord" (**Proverbs 16:33**).

The Trust Required

Consider the level of trust this process required. Each tribe had to believe that the other representatives would treat them fairly in drafting the divisions. They had to trust that Joshua would handle the casting of lots faithfully. Above all, they had to trust that the Lord would assign their inheritance according to His wisdom and goodness.

This was no small thing. Land meant survival, stability, and future generations. Yet the tribes submitted themselves to a process that emphasized cooperation and divine decision-making rather than competition and self-determination.

Such trust is rare in our time. We are more accustomed to systems where each party defends its own interests vigorously, fearful that if they do not, they will be left with less. The model in Joshua 18 calls us to something higher: to believe that God Himself ensures fairness and that His people can work together in humility rather than rivalry.

Lessons for Us

1. **Seek Cooperative Solutions.**
   When facing challenges—whether in family, ministry, or community—it is tempting to default to competition. But Joshua 18 shows the value of working side by side, pooling insights, and crafting solutions together.

2. **Entrust Outcomes to God.**
   Planning and preparation are essential, but final outcomes belong to the Lord. Just as Israel cast lots before Him, we must surrender our plans and trust His sovereignty.

3. **Value the Process of Listening.**
   Twenty-one men gathered information and produced one report. That required listening well, considering others' perspectives, and building consensus. True wisdom often emerges from the integration of many voices.

4. **Cultivate Trust and Relationship.**
   Such a process could only work if the tribes trusted one another and trusted God. Our willingness to collaborate is directly tied to the depth of our relationships and our confidence in the Lord's faithfulness.

A Call to Faithful Obedience

The tribes of Israel could not receive their inheritance without participating in this process. They had to send representatives, walk the land, and record the divisions. They had to gather at Shiloh and submit to God's decision. Faith required action, and obedience required trust.

So it is with us. God's promises often unfold through our willingness to step into the process He designs. Sometimes that process requires hard conversations, patient cooperation, and a willingness to yield control of the outcome to Him. But on the other side of obedience is inheritance—the blessing of receiving what God has prepared.

Conclusion

The passage in Joshua 18 is more than a logistical footnote; it is a picture of how God's people can work together with humility, wisdom, and faith. Twenty-one representatives surveyed the land and created a fair plan. Joshua cast lots before the Lord. God Himself decided.

The result was not chaos but peace, not rivalry but shared inheritance. May we learn from their example, seeking cooperative solutions, entrusting outcomes to God, and cultivating the trust and relationship required for true unity. For when we walk together in this way, we reflect the faith of a people who believe that God Himself orders our steps and secures our inheritance.

Lessons in the Wilderness: God's Training Through Hardship

The wilderness is not a comfortable place. It is dry, harsh, and full of uncertainty. Yet it was precisely in the wilderness that God chose to shape His people Israel, and it is often in our own wilderness seasons that He does His deepest work in us. In **Deuteronomy 8:2–6**, Moses reminds the Israelites of what the Lord had been doing during their forty years in the desert. These words echo through the centuries and into our lives today, reminding us that hardship is never wasted when God is our teacher.

"And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, in order to humble you, putting you to the test, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not."
—Deuteronomy 8:2 (NASB)

Hard Times Are a Test and Training

The wilderness years were not an accident. They were not simply the result of poor planning or bad luck. The Lord Himself "led" them there. Why? "To humble you, putting you to the test, to know what was in your heart." God uses seasons of insufficiency to expose what lies deep within us. Will we trust Him, or will we grumble? Will we cling to His promises, or will we insist on our own way?

Hard times function like a refining fire. They strip away illusions of self-sufficiency and reveal the true posture of our hearts. We cannot fake obedience in the desert. Either we bow to God's will or we resist it. In this way, trials become a kind of spiritual training ground, where faith is either strengthened or exposed as shallow.

His Provision Is Part of the Lesson

But God did not only test; He also provided. Verse 3 says, "He humbled you and let you go hungry, and fed you with the manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know." Notice that both hunger and provision were intentional. The Lord allowed them to experience lack, but He never abandoned them. He gave them daily bread from heaven—manna, something completely new and unfamiliar.

God's provision was part of the curriculum. By feeding them in such an unexpected way, He was teaching them to rely not on their own efforts, but on Him. Even their clothing did not wear out, and their feet did not swell for forty years (**v. 4**). Every detail of their survival was evidence of His faithful hand.

In our lives, too, God sometimes allows us to reach the end of our resources so that His provision can shine brighter. He gives us what we could never produce on our own, so that we might learn gratitude and dependence rather than pride.

Growing in Humility, Faith, and Gratitude

The wilderness was designed to humble Israel. Pride dies slowly, but it dies more quickly when we realize how fragile we truly are. Day after day, the Israelites had to gather manna. Day after day, they had to rely on God for water and protection. This stripped away the illusion that they were in control.

And in place of pride, the Lord intended to cultivate faith and gratitude. Faith, because they had to trust Him for tomorrow's manna, not hoarding today's supply. Gratitude, because every bite of food, every thread of clothing, every step without pain was a reminder of His goodness.

Our hardships are meant to produce the same qualities in us. The apostle Paul later echoes this truth: "We also celebrate in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope" (**Romans 5:3–4**). Gratitude grows when we recognize that even in suffering, God's hand sustains us.

Learning That the Spirit Gives Life

Perhaps the most famous phrase from this passage is in verse 3: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but man shall live on everything that comes out of the mouth of the Lord." Jesus Himself quoted this verse when tempted by the devil in the wilderness (**Matthew 4:4**).

The lesson is clear: physical sustenance is not enough. Bread fills the stomach, but it is God's Word that fills the soul. Israel needed food, but more than that, they

needed to learn that true life comes from the Spirit. The manna was temporary; the Word of God is eternal.

How often do we measure life by physical abundance—by bank accounts, job security, or health? Yet the Lord reminds us that those things are fleeting. What truly sustains us is the Spirit of God and the promises of His Word. Only by feeding on His truth do we find life that endures.

Evidence of Growth: Obedience and Honor

God's purpose in the wilderness was not only to test and to provide, but also to produce obedience. Verse 5 draws the connection to discipline: "So you are to know in your heart that the Lord your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son." A father does not discipline his child out of cruelty but out of love, shaping his character and guiding him into maturity.

The evidence of Israel's growth was meant to be obedience. Verse 6 concludes: "Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him." Humility, faith, and gratitude are not abstract emotions. They show themselves in concrete obedience—walking in God's ways, honoring Him, and living under His authority.

Likewise, the measure of our spiritual growth is not how many trials we endure, but how faithfully we respond. Do hardships lead us closer to the Lord in obedience, or do they drive us away in bitterness? True growth is revealed not just in what we believe, but in how we live.

Remembering the Wilderness

Moses commanded the people to "remember all the way" the Lord had led them. Memory is critical because we are prone to forget. Once we enter seasons of abundance, it is easy to think we earned it ourselves. But when we remember the wilderness—when we recall the hunger, the manna, the discipline—we are grounded in gratitude and humility.

Our own wilderness stories serve the same purpose. When we look back and see how God sustained us, how He humbled us, how He grew our faith, we are

reminded to walk in His ways today. The wilderness becomes not just a season of survival but a testimony of God's goodness.

Conclusion: Walking in His Ways

The wilderness was never meant to last forever, but it was always meant to leave a lasting impression. God's people were trained there for forty years so they could enter the promised land with hearts ready to trust, obey, and honor Him.

We, too, face wilderness seasons—times of insufficiency, testing, and dependence. But we can be confident that the same God who led Israel leads us still. He uses hardship as training, His provision as a lesson, and His Word as our true bread.

The call remains the same: "Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him" (**Deuteronomy 8:6**).

May we embrace the wilderness as God's classroom, where humility, faith, and gratitude grow, and may our lives bear the evidence of that growth through obedience and honor to Him.

The Hope of the Coming King: Understanding Historical Premillennialism

In doing research for my recent book, available as a free ebook here, I dug a bit more deeply into Historical Premillennialism than I had previously. I thought it might be interesting to give a short summary here. If you want more information, you can delve into the appendix in my new book. The book itself is merely a novel, not a scholarly or technical book on eschatology.

"Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus… and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."

— Revelation 20:4 (NASB)

For two thousand years, Christians have looked forward to one unshakable hope—the visible return of Jesus Christ. While believers have differed over how and when that return unfolds, one ancient view has held a steady place in the history of the Church. It is called Historical Premillennialism, and it offers a profoundly Christ-centered picture of history's climax: the King returning to reign, evil finally judged, and creation at last restored.

1. What "Historical Premillennialism" Means

The term premillennial means "before the millennium." It describes the belief that Jesus Christ will return before the thousand-year reign mentioned in Revelation 20:1–6. This reign—often called the Millennium—is not symbolic or purely heavenly, but a real, earthly kingdom under the direct rule of Christ.

The word historical distinguishes this view from the later dispensational forms that arose in the 1800s. Historical Premillennialism traces back to the earliest Christian writers, such as Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian. Interestingly, all these men were either disciple or grand-disciples of John, the author of Revelation. These early believers saw the millennial kingdom not as fantasy or allegory but as the natural fulfillment of God's promises: Christ reigning on earth, righteousness prevailing, and the saints sharing in His rule.

At its heart, this view declares that the same Jesus who ascended in glory will return in glory—to restore the world He redeemed.

2. The Millennium: The Beginning of Consummated Life

When Christ returns, believers—living and dead—will be resurrected or transformed into glorified, imperishable bodies (1 Corinthians 15:51–54; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). From that moment forward, they will never die again. Eternal life has begun in its fullest, bodily form.

During the Millennium, these glorified believers reign with Christ on a renewed but still present earth. It is not yet the final new creation of Revelation 21–22, but it is the first stage of eternity. The saints are incorruptible and radiant, serving as co-regents with the Lord:

"You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign upon the earth." (Revelation 5:10)

"If we endure, we will also reign with Him." (2 Timothy 2:12)

Their reign is not about dominance but about servant kingship—governing the nations, teaching righteousness, and manifesting divine justice. Under Christ's authority, they administer mercy, wisdom, and peace to a world still inhabited by mortal humanity.

3. Mortal Humanity in the Kingdom

According to Historical Premillennialism, not everyone on earth at Christ's coming perishes. Many people survive the Tribulation and enter the Millennium as ordinary mortals—still capable of sin, marriage, and death. These survivors, and their descendants, live under Christ's visible rule.

Isaiah foresaw this when he wrote, "The youth will die at the age of one hundred… for the young man will die at the age of one hundred, and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred will be thought accursed." (Isaiah 65:20, NASB).

The glorified saints reign among them, teaching and guiding. The nations come to worship in Jerusalem, fulfilling prophecies such as Zechariah 14:16: "Then it will

come about that any who are left of all the nations… will go up from year to year to worship the King."

The Millennium thus contains two groups of people:

- The glorified, reigning with Christ.
- The mortal, learning righteousness under His rule.

It is a time of peace, truth, and restoration—the first dawn of what creation was always meant to be.

4. The Purpose of the Millennium

Why would God ordain a thousand-year reign before the eternal state? The Millennium is not a pause between history and heaven; it is the bridge between redemption and recreation.

1. It vindicates God's promises. Every covenant and prophecy—from Abraham's descendants to Israel's restoration—is fulfilled before all nations' eyes.

2. It reveals true righteousness. The world finally sees what just government looks like when ruled by the perfect King.

3. It exposes the human heart. Even after a thousand years of peace, some will still rebel when Satan is released (Revelation 20:7–10), proving that sin's root lies not in environment but in unregenerate hearts.

4. It displays God's mercy. Survivors of the Tribulation are granted life under Christ's rule rather than immediate judgment, experiencing the goodness and patience of God firsthand.

The Millennium, in short, is heaven's justice made visible—a world at peace under the reign of Christ.

5. From the Millennium to Eternity

After the thousand years, Scripture says Satan will be released for a final test of humanity's loyalty. His rebellion is short-lived; fire from heaven consumes his armies, and he is cast forever into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10).

Then comes the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11–15). The dead are raised, the books are opened, and every life is weighed by divine justice. Death and Hades are destroyed, and only those whose names are written in the Book of Life remain.

At that moment, the old creation passes away. John writes:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away… And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." (Revelation 21:1–2, NASB)

This is the final and eternal order—the complete union of heaven and earth. God Himself dwells among His people. The mediating throne of Christ's millennial reign gives way to the unmediated presence of God: "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it… and they will see His face." (Revelation 22:3–4).

6. A Faith Rooted in History

Historical Premillennialism is not speculation about the future—it is the early Church's confidence in God's unfolding plan. Papias envisioned a world of peace and abundance under Christ's rule. Justin Martyr affirmed the resurrection and a literal thousand-year reign in Jerusalem. Irenaeus saw it as the "training ground" of eternity—a world restored before it is remade. Tertullian called it the world's Sabbath, a foretaste of perfect rest.

Modern theologians such as George Eldon Ladd, Millard Erickson, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Saucy have built on that foundation. They agree that the Millennium fulfills God's promises and transitions history into eternity. It is not a detour but the first act of eternal life made visible.

As Ladd wrote, "The Millennium is still history, the reign of Christ within the old order. The New Jerusalem belongs to the eternal order that follows."

7. The Long Arc of Hope

The vision of Historical Premillennialism is not one of fear but of faith fulfilled. It tells us that history is not spiraling out of control but moving toward restoration. Every trial, every injustice, every unanswered prayer finds resolution in the reign of the returning King.

When Christ comes again, evil collapses, righteousness fills the earth, and the saints who once suffered now serve as agents of His healing rule. The Lamb who was slain becomes the reigning Lion, and the meek inherit the earth.

And when the thousand years are complete, time itself will give way to eternity—the New Jerusalem descending, God dwelling with His people, and the light of His presence filling all things.

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.” — Revelation 11:15

Until that day, we live in hope—not a vague optimism, but the confident expectation that the same Jesus who came once to redeem will come again to reign.

Faith, Hope, and Love: The Triple Cord of Christian Life

"But now faith, hope, and love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

— 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NASB)

Among all the inspired words written by the apostle Paul, few lines capture the heartbeat of Christian life more perfectly than this. In a world filled with striving and uncertainty, Paul reminds us that three realities endure when all else fades: faith, hope, and love. These are not passing emotions or abstract virtues—they are the spiritual DNA of every believer, woven together into one unbreakable cord that anchors us to Christ.

Let's explore how these three graces relate to one another, how they shape our daily walk, and why love is called the greatest of all.

1. Faith: Trusting the God We Cannot See

Faith is the starting point of all true relationship with God. Hebrews 11:1 defines it as, "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Faith is not blind optimism; it is confidence grounded in the character of a faithful God.

Faith looks backward to what God has done—His promises, His covenant, His cross—and then steps forward in trust. We believe because we have seen His faithfulness in the past. As Paul wrote elsewhere, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

Faith takes God at His word. It believes before it sees, and it acts before the evidence is complete. Abraham exemplified this kind of faith when he left his homeland not knowing where he was going, trusting only the One who called him (Hebrews 11:8).

But faith is not static—it moves. Genuine faith always produces action. It leads us to obey when obedience costs something, to persevere when we cannot see the outcome, and to believe God's promises even when circumstances shout otherwise.

Faith says, "God is able." And that assurance opens the door to the next virtue: hope.

2. Hope: Anticipating the God We Will See

If faith believes that God is faithful now, hope believes that He will be faithful still. Hope stretches forward—it is faith projected into the future.

Romans 15:13 captures this beautifully:

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Faith gives birth to hope, and hope sustains faith. Without hope, faith grows weary; without faith, hope has no foundation. Together they form the rhythm of spiritual endurance.

Hope is not wishful thinking. The biblical word (*elpis*) means confident expectation. It is anchored not in probabilities, but in promises. It rests in the certainty that what God has begun, He will finish (Philippians 1:6).

Hope lifts our eyes above the temporary and fixes them on the eternal. It allows us to endure the trials of this life because we know that something better is coming. As Paul wrote in Romans 8:24–25, "For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, through perseverance we wait eagerly for it."

Hope gives the soul its buoyancy. It steadies us in grief, strengthens us in waiting, and makes us radiant in darkness. The believer who lives in hope can say with David, "I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." (Psalm 27:13).

And yet, hope alone would remain incomplete without the third and greatest of the three—love.

3. Love: Reflecting the God We Already Know

If faith is trust and hope is anticipation, love is participation. It is the active expression of God's nature in the believer's life.

The apostle John declares plainly, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Love is not merely something God does—it is who He is. Faith and hope connect us to His promises, but love connects us to His person.

Paul calls love the greatest because it is eternal. Faith and hope belong to this life; they are the bridge that carries us toward eternity. But love never ends. When faith becomes sight and hope becomes fulfillment, love will still remain—burning ever brighter in the presence of the One who is Love Himself.

Love is the ultimate goal of all spiritual growth. It is the maturity toward which faith and hope lead. Faith without love can become rigid; hope without love can become self-focused. But love holds both in harmony.

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love." — Galatians 5:6 (NASB)

Notice that faith is not meant to work apart from love but through it. Love purifies faith from pride and hope from presumption. It turns belief into compassion and expectation into service.

4. The Interwoven Nature of the Three

Imagine faith, hope, and love as strands of one cord. Each is distinct, but they strengthen one another:

- Faith grounds us in God's truth.
- Hope keeps us looking toward His future.
- Love keeps us aligned with His heart.

If we lose faith, hope collapses. If we lose hope, love grows cold. But when all three operate together, the Christian life becomes strong, resilient, and radiant.

Paul's triad appears several times in Scripture—not just in 1 Corinthians 13:13, but also in passages like 1 Thessalonians 1:3:

"constantly keeping in mind your work of faith and labor of love and perseverance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

Notice the progression again—faith works, love labors, hope perseveres. Together, they form a complete picture of discipleship: trusting God, loving people, and waiting with endurance for His return.

5. How to Cultivate Faith, Hope, and Love

The beauty of this triad is that none of these virtues grows in isolation. They mature together as we walk daily with Christ.

- To grow in faith, immerse yourself in God's Word. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17). The more you know His promises, the more you will trust His heart.

- To grow in hope, fix your eyes on eternity. Remember that this world is not your home. Reflect on the resurrection, the coming kingdom, and the glory to come.

- To grow in love, abide in Christ. As Jesus said, "Abide in My love… This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you." (John 15:9, 12). Love flourishes where we stay close to the Source.

The Spirit Himself is the gardener of these virtues. He nurtures them not in ease, but in the soil of real life—through trials, through waiting, through service, through forgiveness. Each challenge becomes an opportunity to deepen faith, enlarge hope, and express love.

6. The Greatest of These

Why does Paul call love "the greatest"? Because love alone reflects the eternal character of God. Faith and hope are temporary bridges; love is the destination.

When we stand before Christ one day, faith will give way to sight and hope to fulfillment, but love will continue forever. It is both the essence of heaven and the evidence of true discipleship here on earth.

As Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another." (John 13:35).

Love is not the reward for spiritual maturity—it is its proof. It is the fragrance of Christ through His people, the visible mark of invisible grace.

A Closing Reflection

Faith believes.

Hope anticipates.

Love acts.

Together they form the rhythm of the Christian journey—the inward trust, the upward gaze, and the outward embrace.

When faith anchors your soul, hope lifts your eyes, and love directs your steps, you are living the full symphony of grace.

May we, like the believers of old, cling to this triple cord that cannot be broken—trusting the God we cannot see, rejoicing in the future we cannot yet touch, and loving as we have been loved.

"Now faith, hope, and love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

Calling Forth Faith: How to Nurture Belief in Others and Grow in Our Own

Key Verse:

"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." — Romans 10:17 (NASB)

Faith is both a gift from God and a responsibility we must nurture. It is a divine spark placed in human hearts, meant to grow into a steady flame that lights the path of trust, obedience, and love. But how do we call forth faith in others—and how do we strengthen it in ourselves?

Scripture shows that faith is not something we manufacture by force of will; it is something we receive, cultivate, and share. The same God who authored faith in us (Hebrews 12:2) invites us to join Him in awakening faith in others through word, example, and prayer.

Let's look at what the Bible teaches about both aspects—how to call forth faith in others and how to grow in our own faith.

1. Calling Forth Faith in Others

Paul wrote in Romans 1:11–12, "For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine."

Faith can be called forth in others through several powerful means: speaking the Word, modeling faith, and interceding in prayer.

a. Speak the Word of Christ

Faith begins with hearing truth. Romans 10:17 makes this plain: "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

When we share God's Word—whether through teaching, personal testimony, or a quiet conversation—we open a channel for the Holy Spirit to work in someone's

heart. Scripture is alive and active (Hebrews 4:12). It does not return empty (Isaiah 55:11).

We often underestimate how powerful even a single verse can be when spoken in the right moment. Jesus called forth faith again and again by His words: "Do not fear, only believe" (Mark 5:36); "According to your faith be it done to you" (Matthew 9:29); "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23).

When we remind others of God's promises—when we speak truth in love—we are participating in the same ministry of encouragement that Jesus exercised daily.

b. Model Faith Through Obedience

Faith is contagious. When others see believers trusting God amid uncertainty, they are inspired to do the same. Paul could say, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1).

This is not arrogance—it's discipleship. By living out faith transparently, we invite others to trust the same faithful God. When we step out on God's promises, our courage gives others courage.

Hebrews 11—often called the "Hall of Faith"—is essentially a record of how the faith of one generation called forth faith in the next. Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses—all believed, and their belief became a testimony that still speaks today (Hebrews 11:4).

Your obedience might be the sermon someone else needs to hear.

c. Intercede for Faith to Awaken

Ultimately, faith is God's work in the heart. That's why one of the most loving things we can do is pray for faith to be born or strengthened in others.

Jesus Himself did this. In Luke 22:32, He told Peter, "I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail." What a beautiful glimpse into the Savior's intercession!

When we pray for others, we cooperate with the Spirit who convicts, comforts, and calls. We cannot force belief, but we can till the soil through prayer so that God's Word may take root.

Interceding for faith means asking God to remove spiritual blindness (2 Corinthians 4:4), to open hearts to the truth (Acts 16:14), and to reveal His faithfulness personally.

Faith is born in the heart, but it is often called forth by the prayers and words of those who already believe.

2. Growing in Our Own Faith

Calling forth faith in others is inseparable from nurturing our own. If we are not growing in faith ourselves, our encouragement will lack authenticity and power. So how do we strengthen the faith we already possess? Scripture gives several clear pathways.

a. Feed Faith with the Word

Faith is nourished by truth. Just as physical strength requires food, spiritual strength requires regular intake of Scripture.

The psalmist wrote, "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." (Psalm 19:7).

Reading God's Word reminds us of His character, His promises, and His track record of faithfulness. Each story of deliverance, each fulfilled prophecy, each display of grace reinforces our trust in Him.

If faith comes by hearing, then our faith grows by continuing to listen—to meditate on God's truth until it reshapes our perspective.

b. Exercise Faith Through Obedience

Faith, like a muscle, grows through use. James 2:22 says of Abraham, "You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected."

When we step out in obedience—especially when it costs something—our faith matures. Every act of trust strengthens the next.

Think of Peter stepping out of the boat (Matthew 14:29). It was risky, it was imperfect, but it was real faith. The more we act on what we believe, the more we experience God's reliability firsthand.

c. Remember God's Faithfulness

Faith thrives on remembrance. The Israelites often faltered because they forgot what God had done (Psalm 106:7). We do the same.

That's why it's so important to recall His past mercies. Journaling answered prayers, rehearsing testimonies, or even sharing stories with others helps us remember that God has never failed us yet.

David strengthened his faith this way: before facing Goliath, he remembered the lion and the bear (1 Samuel 17:37). He drew courage for today from God's faithfulness yesterday.

d. Pray for More Faith

Even the apostles prayed, "Increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5). God delights to answer that prayer.

He may strengthen faith through Scripture, through trials (James 1:3), or through fellowship with believers who encourage us. Faith grows best in the soil of dependence—when we trust God beyond our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5–6).

The prayer of the desperate father in Mark 9:24 captures it well: "I do believe; help my unbelief!" That's not a contradiction—it's an honest confession that faith and doubt can coexist, but faith can grow as we bring our doubts to God rather than hiding them.

3. Faith That Multiplies

Faith was never meant to be a private possession. It is like light—its very nature is to shine and spread.

When we feed our faith, we strengthen others. When we call forth faith in others, our own faith deepens. It's a divine cycle of encouragement and growth.

Paul told Timothy, "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful people who will be able to teach others also." (2 Timothy 2:2).

Faith multiplies when we invest in others—when we teach, pray, and model the trust we ourselves are learning.

A Closing Reflection

Faith is not the absence of fear or doubt; it is the decision to trust God in the middle of them. It grows through hearing His Word, obeying His call, remembering His works, and praying for His help. And when we live out that kind of faith, we naturally call it forth in others.

You don't have to be a preacher or theologian to inspire faith. You only need to be a believer whose life says, "God is trustworthy." Your steadfast trust in Him may be the spark that ignites faith in someone else.

"Let us hold firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to encourage one another in love and good deeds." — Hebrews 10:23–24 (NASB)

A Prayer for Today

Lord Jesus, thank You for the gift of faith. Help me to grow in trust, to listen to Your Word, and to act in obedience. Use my life and my words to awaken faith in others. When doubts arise, remind me of Your faithfulness. Make me a vessel through whom Your light and truth can shine, that others may come to believe. Amen.

Growing in Hope — and Helping Others Do the Same

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

— Romans 15:13 (NASB)

Hope is oxygen for the soul. Without it, faith grows weary and love loses its energy. With it, even the darkest season becomes bearable. Scripture doesn't describe hope as a fragile wish—it presents it as a living anchor, fastened to the unchanging promises of God.

We all go through times when hope feels dim. Life's disappointments, unanswered prayers, or long seasons of waiting can cause the horizon of our hearts to cloud over. Yet God not only wants to restore our hope; He wants to grow it—and to use us to help others find it as well.

Let's look together at what it means to grow in hope, how God cultivates it, and how we can be instruments of hope in the lives of those around us.

1. Hope Begins with Believing God's Character

Paul's prayer in Romans 15:13 begins with this phrase: "Now may the God of hope…"

That short expression tells us everything about where hope comes from. It doesn't come from circumstances, from personality, or from mere optimism. Hope comes from knowing who God is.

The more we know His heart, the more confident we become in His promises. Our hope deepens not because life gets easier, but because our trust in His character gets stronger.

The psalmist wrote:

"For You are my hope; O Lord God, You are my confidence from my youth." — Psalm 71:5 (NASB)

Notice that the focus isn't on what the psalmist hopes for, but on whom he hopes in. Christian hope is not rooted in outcomes—it's rooted in relationship. We don't hope in luck, effort, or fate; we hope in a living Person whose goodness cannot fail.

When you find yourself struggling to hold onto hope, start by reminding yourself of who God has already proven Himself to be. Reflect on His past faithfulness. Remember answered prayers, unexpected provisions, or moments of comfort you didn't think would come. Rehearse His record.

Hope grows best in the soil of remembrance.

2. Hope Grows Through God's Word

Romans 15:4 tells us, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

Scripture is not just a history book—it is a hope book. Every page reveals the trustworthiness of the One who keeps His word. The same God who brought Israel through the Red Sea, who sustained Elijah through drought, who raised Lazarus from the dead, is your God today.

When we read His promises, we are not just studying doctrine—we are inhaling hope.

That's why daily time in God's Word is essential to growing in hope. Without it, we are like plants trying to grow without sunlight.

A practical way to cultivate hope through Scripture is to create a "Hope Journal." Each day, write down one verse that reminds you of God's faithfulness. Over time, those verses become like stepping stones across the waters of doubt—markers that guide you back to solid ground when fear rises.

Some good starting points include:

- Psalm 42:11 — "Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him."
- Lamentations 3:21–24 — "The Lord's mercies never cease… therefore I have hope."

- Isaiah 40:31 — “Those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength.”
- Romans 8:24–25 — “If we hope for what we do not see, through perseverance we wait eagerly for it.”

Each time you meditate on these truths, hope takes deeper root in your heart.

3. Hope Is Strengthened Through Trials

Hope doesn’t grow in comfort; it grows in challenge.

Paul writes in Romans 5:3–4,

“We exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope.”

That’s not the path any of us would choose, but it is the one God uses. Trials refine faith the way fire refines gold. Each time we walk through hardship and find God faithful again, our confidence in Him becomes stronger and steadier.

This means that even suffering is never wasted. God uses the very things that seem to threaten our hope to strengthen it instead. When we endure, when we keep believing even when we can’t see, hope matures from a fragile feeling into a steady conviction.

Ask Joseph, who endured prison before the palace. Ask Daniel, who stood firm among lions. Ask Paul, who sang hymns in a cell. Their hope did not depend on what they could see—it depended on the One who held them fast.

When your hope feels small, remember that you are in the growing season.

4. Hope Flourishes in Community

Hope thrives in fellowship. God never intended for us to nurture hope in isolation.

Hebrews 10:23–24 says:

“Let us hold firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to encourage one another in love and good deeds.”

We need each other to keep believing. When our own faith trembles, the encouragement of others can hold us up. Sometimes the most powerful ministry we can offer is simply to say, "I've been there—and God was faithful."

Helping others grow in hope does not require eloquence or expertise. It requires presence. It means walking alongside someone who is discouraged, listening without rushing to fix, and reminding them gently that God has not changed.

You might help restore hope in someone's heart by:

- Sharing how God met you in a season of uncertainty.
- Sending Scripture verses or prayers that speak life.
- Offering practical help in times of need.
- Simply being a steady, compassionate presence.

Hope shared is hope multiplied.

5. Hope Points to Eternity

Ultimately, all our earthly hopes are meant to aim our hearts toward one great and final hope: the return of Christ and the restoration of all things.

Titus 2:13 calls this "the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."

No matter how bleak the world becomes, this truth stands: history is not ending in chaos but in Christ's victory. Every tear will be wiped away; every injustice will be made right; every longing will be fulfilled.

This is not fantasy—it is the unbreakable promise of God. And when we live in that expectation, we become people who radiate hope to a hopeless world.

6. Helping Others Catch the Light

If hope is light, then we are called to be mirrors—reflecting it toward those who cannot yet see.

You can help others grow in hope by:

1. Speaking words of life. Proverbs 12:25 says, "Anxiety in a person's heart weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad." Even a few sentences of genuine encouragement can revive someone's heart.

2. Praying specifically for hope. Paul prayed that believers would "abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." We can do the same for one another.

3. Living hopefully yourself. Nothing inspires hope like watching someone else endure with joy. Your calm trust in God amid trial becomes a testimony more powerful than any sermon.

The world does not need more cheerleaders of optimism—it needs ambassadors of hope, people whose confidence rests not in changing times but in the unchanging God.

A Closing Prayer

Father, You are the God of hope. Teach me to trust Your character more deeply, to rest in Your promises, and to see Your hand even when I don't understand. Grow in me a hope that endures through every storm. And let my life become a channel of Your hope to others—lifting the weary, strengthening the fainthearted, and pointing every soul toward the sure and certain hope of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Growing in Love — and Helping Others Do the Same

"We love, because He first loved us."

— 1 John 4:19 (NASB)

Love is the heartbeat of the Christian life. It is not a peripheral virtue; it is the very center of what it means to know and follow God. The apostle Paul wrote, "Now faith, hope, and love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love." (1 Corinthians 13:13). Love outlasts faith and hope because it is the essence of God Himself—eternal, self-giving, and pure.

Yet love does not come naturally to us. It must be planted, nurtured, and grown by the Spirit of God. The good news is that He delights to do this work in us—and through us—to draw others into the same transforming love.

Let's look together at how we can grow in love and help others do the same.

1. Love Begins with God

Before we can grow in love, we must understand where it begins. Scripture tells us that God Himself is love (1 John 4:8). That means love is not a human invention or emotion—it is the very nature of the divine.

When John writes, "We love, because He first loved us," he's showing us that all true love is responsive. We don't manufacture it; we reflect it. Love grows in us only as we receive and remain in the love that God has already shown.

Jesus described this beautifully in John 15:9:

"Just as the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you; remain in My love."

To grow in love, we must first dwell in it. Spend time daily reflecting on the love of God revealed in Christ—His patience, His compassion, His willingness to forgive, His humility in serving, His sacrifice on the cross.

When we truly grasp that we are loved like that—fully, unconditionally, eternally—it changes the soil of our hearts. Love can only grow where we live in constant awareness of being loved ourselves.

2. Love Is Grown Through Obedience

Jesus didn't just tell us to feel love; He called us to practice it.

"If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and remain in His love."

— John 15:10 (NASB)

Obedience is the trellis on which love grows. When we choose to obey God's Word—even when it's uncomfortable—we make space for His love to take root in us.

That means forgiving when we'd rather stay bitter.

Serving when we'd rather rest.

Giving when we'd rather keep.

Listening when we'd rather speak.

These are not small sacrifices. But every act of obedience tills the soil of our hearts, allowing God's love to expand its reach.

The world defines love as a feeling; Jesus defines it as a choice—a cross-shaped act of the will. The deeper we walk in obedience, the more our emotions begin to align with God's heart.

Love matures not in moments of ease but in moments of surrender.

3. Love Deepens Through the Holy Spirit

We cannot will ourselves into divine love. We can only open ourselves to the Spirit who produces it.

Paul writes in Romans 5:5:

"The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

The Holy Spirit does not sprinkle love sparingly; He pours it out abundantly. That means love is not a scarce resource—it is a gift continually replenished from God's heart to ours.

When you feel your capacity to love running dry—when patience wears thin, compassion fades, or forgiveness feels impossible—pause and pray:

"Holy Spirit, fill me again with Your love. Love this person through me."

Love is not a performance; it is a partnership. The Spirit uses our words, our hands, and our hearts as channels through which God's love flows to the world.

As we depend on Him, we find that love becomes more than an obligation—it becomes joy.

4. Love Is Strengthened in Community

Love cannot grow in isolation. It grows in the friction and grace of real relationships—where people test our patience, stretch our humility, and call us to compassion.

Jesus made love the identifying mark of His followers:

"By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another."

— John 13:35 (NASB)

Community is the classroom of love. It's where we learn to bear with one another, forgive one another, and rejoice with one another. It's also where our rough edges are smoothed and our self-centeredness is exposed.

When we invest in genuine fellowship—listening, sharing, serving—we create space for the Spirit to knit our hearts together.

Helping others grow in love begins with living it among them. Be the first to extend grace. Speak gently. Practice empathy. Encourage someone who feels unseen. Every small act of love teaches others what love looks like.

As Paul reminds us, “Love never fails.” (1 Corinthians 13:8). Even when it seems unnoticed, love always leaves a mark that eternity will reveal.

5. Love Expands Through Service

If faith expresses itself through works (James 2:17), then love expresses itself through service.

Love grows stronger the more it gives away. Like a muscle, it becomes resilient through use. Jesus said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28).

When we serve others—especially those who cannot repay us—we mirror the love of Christ. Each time we choose to care for someone else’s need, our hearts are reshaped to resemble His.

Ask the Lord each morning:

“Who can I serve today? Who can I encourage? Whose burden can I lighten?”

You don’t need a stage, a title, or a program to show love. A note, a visit, a meal, a prayer—all are seeds of divine love that God can multiply beyond your sight.

6. Love Perseveres Through Forgiveness

If we are to grow in love, we must learn to forgive quickly. Unforgiveness is the frost that kills love at the root.

Paul urged believers, “Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:32).

Forgiveness doesn’t excuse sin—it releases the offender from our judgment so God can work. It frees us from bitterness and reopens the flow of divine love in our hearts.

If you find it hard to forgive, start by praying for the person who hurt you. You may not feel love right away, but love will begin to grow as you act on it. Forgiveness is the soil where new love can spring up again.

7. Helping Others Grow in Love

Just as hope can be shared, so can love. Helping others grow in love means guiding them back to its source.

You can help others grow in love by:

- Modeling it. People learn what love looks like by watching it lived out.
- Affirming it. Point out acts of kindness and compassion in others—affirming love strengthens it.
- Teaching it. Share Scriptures that reveal God's love and discuss what they mean in real life.
- Praying it. Ask God to deepen their understanding of His love and to fill them with the Spirit of love.

As you model patience, humility, and compassion, others begin to mirror those same qualities. Love multiplies when it is demonstrated, not just described.

8. Love Points Back to Christ

All growth in love ultimately points to one Person: Jesus.

He is the vine; we are the branches (John 15:5). Our love is not self-sustained—it is drawn from His life within us. The more we remain connected to Him, the more His love flows through us.

"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you." — John 15:12 (NASB)

That simple phrase, "as I have loved you," defines our calling. We love as He loved—sacrificially, faithfully, endlessly.

When people encounter that kind of love through us, they encounter Christ Himself.

A Closing Prayer

Father, You are love itself. Thank You for loving me first and never ceasing to do so. Teach me to remain in Your love and to let it shape my heart, words, and actions. Fill me with Your Spirit so that I may love as Jesus loves—freely, humbly, and without fear. Help me to be a vessel of Your love to others, that they too may know the depth, the height, and the breadth of Your unfailing love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Blessed to Be a Blessing: Living the Prayer of Solomon

When King Solomon dedicated the temple in Jerusalem, he prayed one of the most beautiful and far-reaching prayers in all of Scripture. After acknowledging God's covenant faithfulness and steadfast love, Solomon concluded with this plea:

"May the Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers; may He not leave us or forsake us, so that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances, which He commanded our fathers. And may these words of mine, with which I have made supplication before the Lord, be near to the Lord our God day and night, so that He may maintain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel, as each day requires, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no one else. Your heart therefore shall be wholly devoted to the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments, as at this day."

— 1 Kings 8:57–61 (NASB)

At the heart of Solomon's prayer lies a profound truth about God's purpose for His people: He blesses us so that all nations might know Him. Israel was chosen not merely for privilege, but for purpose. God drew them close to Himself so that His glory might shine through them—so that all the peoples of the earth would see His greatness and turn to Him in faith.

This divine pattern was not meant to end with Solomon's generation. It began long before, when God first called Abram:

"And I will bless you, and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing… and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

— Genesis 12:2–3 (NASB)

From the very beginning, God's covenant with His people carried a missionary heartbeat. He would reveal Himself to the world through a people whose hearts were turned toward Him. As they obeyed, He would bless them. As He blessed them, the nations would notice and be drawn to His light.

Isaiah would later describe this same purpose with poetic clarity:

"I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

— Isaiah 49:6 (NASB)

God's intention was never that His glory should be confined to one tribe or one land. Israel was meant to be a living testimony of what it looks like when God dwells among His people—a community so transformed by His presence that the surrounding nations would say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (Deuteronomy 4:6).

The Virtuous Cycle of Grace

Notice how Solomon's prayer describes a cycle of grace:

1. God draws His people to Himself — "May He not leave us or forsake us, so that He may incline our hearts to Himself."

2. He enables their obedience and love — "To walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments."

3. Through their faithful lives, His glory is made known — "So that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no one else."

This is not a cycle of human achievement but of divine grace. God initiates; we respond. God empowers; we walk in His ways. God blesses; His fame spreads.

The same rhythm continues today among God's people in Christ. As Paul explained in Romans 11, those who believe in Jesus—Jew and Gentile alike—are part of one family tree:

"But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree… remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you."

— Romans 11:17–18 (NASB)

We who were once outsiders have been grafted into spiritual Israel. The same calling rests upon us: to walk faithfully before God so that His light may reach the nations.

God's Presence, Our Purpose

Solomon prayed, "May the Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers." That prayer was answered most fully in Jesus Christ—"Immanuel, God with us" (Matthew 1:23). In Him, God's presence dwells not in a stone temple but in living hearts. We are now the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), and the light of God's presence is meant to radiate through us into a dark world.

Peter echoes this Old Testament purpose when he writes:

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

— 1 Peter 2:9 (NASB)

The blessing of belonging to God is inseparable from the calling to make Him known. We are blessed to be a blessing—to display His mercy, His justice, His truth, and His compassion in every sphere of life.

Living the Legacy of Solomon's Prayer

Every generation of believers inherits Solomon's prayer as its own. We are to live in such wholehearted devotion that the nations around us see something unmistakably divine—not our strength, but God's faithfulness; not our wisdom, but His Spirit at work in us.

When the church walks in holiness and love, the world glimpses a reflection of God's heart. Jesus said,

"By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

— John 13:35 (NASB)

In our workplaces, our neighborhoods, our families, and our nations, we are to live as living testimonies of the God who blesses. We are the continuation of Solomon's prayer—people whose hearts are inclined toward God so that His fame might fill the earth.

A Modern Echo of an Ancient Prayer

Perhaps we might pray today as Solomon did, but through the fuller light of Christ:

"Lord our God, be with us as You have been with Your people throughout the ages.

Incline our hearts to love You fully, to walk in Your ways, and to keep Your commands.

Let Your presence among us be so real, so radiant, that all nations might see and know that You alone are God.

Use our lives, our homes, our churches, to draw the world to You.

And make us faithful stewards of every blessing You've given,

that we might bless others in Your name."

When we live this way—rooted in His grace, walking in His truth, shining with His love—we fulfill God's ancient promise. We become what Israel was always meant to be: a people through whom "all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

May our hearts, like Solomon's, be wholly devoted to the Lord our God, that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no one else.

The Gospel of the Two Crosses

Based on Mark 8–10

The Gospel of Mark reaches a turning point in chapter 8, when Peter declares, "You are the Christ" (Mark 8:29 NASB). It is the first clear confession of Jesus as Messiah—but it is also a partial understanding. Peter and the disciples can see, but only dimly. Jesus immediately begins to teach them what that confession truly means: that the Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected, be killed, and after three days rise again (Mark 8:31).

Peter's reaction shows his blindness. He rebukes Jesus for even suggesting suffering and death. Peter's problem was not recognizing who Jesus is—but misunderstanding what it means to follow Him. That moment reveals what we might call the gospel of the two crosses: the cross of Jesus, and the cross of the disciple.

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."

— Mark 8:34 (NASB)

The first cross is Christ's cross—the instrument of our redemption. It is the place where the Son of God bore our sins, conquered death, and reconciled us to the Father. But Jesus insists there is a second cross: our own. To follow Him means to die to ourselves daily—to surrender ambition, comfort, pride, and self-preservation.

When these two crosses are separated, the gospel becomes distorted. Jesus' disciples, even after confessing Him as Lord, continually struggle through chapters 8–10 of Mark's Gospel to grasp the necessity of both.

The Blind Man and the Two Touches

Before Peter's confession, Mark records a peculiar healing. A blind man's sight is restored in two stages—first he sees "men like trees walking," then he sees clearly (Mark 8:22–25). This "two-touch" miracle mirrors the disciples' partial understanding. They can identify Jesus as Messiah, but they do not yet see what

that truly means. The second touch will come after the resurrection, when they understand not only His suffering but their own calling to take up the cross.

When the Second Cross Is Not Understood

Chapters 9 and 10 show what ministry looks like when the two crosses are misunderstood.

- At the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2–8), Peter wants to stay on the mountaintop. He says, "Let us make three tabernacles…" not realizing that glory cannot be separated from sacrifice. Without the cross, we prefer comfort to calling.

- When the disciples fail to cast out a demon (Mark 9:14–29), Jesus tells them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer." Power flows from dependence and self-denial, not from human effort or pride.

- As they argue about who is greatest (Mark 9:33–37), Jesus embraces a child—the least and the overlooked—and teaches that greatness in His kingdom is measured by humility and service.

- When they forbid another man casting out demons in Jesus' name (Mark 9:38–41), their sectarian spirit reveals they still seek control and recognition.

- When they debate divorce (Mark 10:1–12), rebuke parents bringing children (10:13–16), and marvel at the rich young ruler (10:17–31), they reveal hearts still shaped by worldly values—status, strength, wealth.

- And finally, when James and John ask for the best seats in glory (Mark 10:35–45), Jesus reminds them once more: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Without understanding the two crosses, we end up with religion that prizes achievement over surrender, image over obedience, position over service.

The Second Touch

Yet by the time we meet Peter again in Acts 3, the second touch has come. The once-fearful disciple now boldly proclaims:

“The things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.”

— Acts 3:18 (NASB)

Peter finally understands both crosses. In his first epistle he writes:

“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.”

— 1 Peter 2:21 (NASB)

The cross of Christ is not only the means of our salvation—it is the model of our life. “Do not be surprised,” Peter adds, “at the fiery ordeal among you… but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing” (1 Peter 4:12–13).

The Upside-Down Kingdom

This gospel turns the world upside down (Acts 17:6). It reveals a kingdom whose values invert the logic of the world:

- The way to be great is to serve (Matthew 20:26–28).
- The way to be strong is to be weak (2 Corinthians 12:9–10).
- The way to be rich is to give away everything (Mark 10:21).
- The way to be wise is to become a fool for Christ (1 Corinthians 1:18–25).
- The way to be first is to be last (Mark 9:35).
- The way to win is to lose (Luke 9:25).
- The way to live is to die (Matthew 10:38–39).

Paul captured this mystery when he said, “We are always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body” (2 Corinthians 4:10). Life flows through death. Resurrection follows crucifixion.

The gospel of the two crosses calls us to join Christ's victory parade not as triumphant conquerors, but as trophies of grace—those who were conquered by love and now live to display His mercy (see 2 Corinthians 2:14–16).

The Marks of the Cross

Jesus' glorified body still bore His scars (John 20:27). He did not erase them; He redeemed them. Paul too could say, "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (Galatians 6:17). The scars of self-giving love are not signs of defeat—they are the proof of true discipleship.

Amy Carmichael captured this in her poem *No Scar*:

Hast thou no scar?

No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?

…Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,

And pierced are the feet that follow Me;

But thine are whole. Can he have followed far

Who has no wound nor scar?

Living Between the Two Crosses

To live in the gospel of the two crosses is to walk in continual surrender—grateful for Christ's sacrifice, and willing to offer ourselves daily as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1). It is the life of the "upside-down kingdom," where glory is found in humility and power in weakness.

We follow a crucified King. His victory came through His wounds. Ours will too.

"Whoever wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."

— Mark 8:34 (NASB)

Only when we embrace both crosses—His for our salvation and ours for His service—will we see clearly and walk in the power that turns the world upside down.

A Biblical Worldview: Seeing Life Through the Lens of Truth

Every person has a worldview—a lens through which they see and interpret the world around them. Whether we realize it or not, our upbringing, education, culture, and experiences shape how we perceive reality. For many, their worldview is formed passively and absorbed from their environment without much deliberate thought. However, as followers of Christ, we are called to embrace a Biblical worldview—one rooted in the truth of God's Word and His eternal purposes.

A Biblical worldview begins with the foundational belief that God exists. As Hebrews 11:6 reminds us, "And without faith, it is impossible to please Him, for the one who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He proves to be the One who rewards those who seek Him." God is the ultimate reality and the standard by which everything else is measured. He created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1), and by His power, all things are sustained (Colossians 1:17).

Scripture is the divinely inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16), providing us with the knowledge we need to understand Him and the world He created. It reveals that God, in His fullness, came to dwell among us in the person of Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:19). Through Christ, we see God's heart and the path to redemption.

Our worldview must also account for the reality of sin. Humanity's rebellion against God began in the Garden of Eden, introducing sin and death into the world (Romans 5:12-14). Sin distorts our view of reality and separates us from our Creator. Yet, God, in His mercy, provided a way for us to be reconciled to Him. Through faith in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and rose again, we receive eternal life (John 3:15-19, Acts 4:10-12).

A Biblical worldview is not merely intellectual assent to these truths; it transforms the way we live. Jesus said, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:21). Obedience to Christ is the evidence of genuine faith (John 14:21, 23-24). Submitting to His Lordship shapes our understanding of all aspects of life:

Epistemology (What is true?): Truth is absolute and originates from God. Jesus declared, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

Metaphysics (What is real?): God is the source of all reality. Everything that exists was created by Him and for Him.

Cosmology (What is the nature and purpose of the universe?): The universe reflects God's glory and serves His purposes.

Teleology (What is the purpose and destiny of everything?): All creation ultimately exists to glorify God. Our eternal destiny hinges on our relationship with Him.

Theology (What is the nature and purpose of God?): God is holy, loving, and just. He desires a relationship with us and has revealed Himself through Jesus.

Anthropology (What is the nature and purpose of humankind?): We are made in God's image, designed to reflect His character, and live in fellowship with Him.

Axiology (What is meaningful, valuable, and beautiful?): True meaning, value, and beauty are found in God and His creation, as seen through His eyes.

Living with a Biblical worldview requires faith, but it is not blind faith. It is a reasonable and rational faith, providing answers to life's deepest questions. In a world filled with uncertainty, God is our constant. He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). His love surpasses human understanding, and He desires that we be filled with His fullness (Ephesians 3:18-19).

As we seek to align our hearts and minds with God's truth, we are equipped to navigate life's challenges with confidence. We can face the shifting sands of culture, knowing that our foundation is secure in Christ. When difficulties arise—whether in our personal lives, careers, or relationships—we can lean on God's unchanging promises. He is our rock and our fortress, an ever-present help in times of trouble (Psalm 46:1).

A Biblical worldview also impacts how we view others. Every person is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), giving each individual inherent worth and dignity. This truth challenges us to love our neighbors, extend grace, and seek justice. It compels us to stand against injustice and speak truth in a world that often values power and convenience over righteousness.

Furthermore, embracing a Biblical worldview fosters hope. We live in a broken world, but we are not without hope. We know that God is at work, redeeming and

restoring all things. One day, Christ will return, and every tear will be wiped away (Revelation 21:4). Until that day, we are called to be His ambassadors, reflecting His love and truth in all that we do.

Let us, then, fix our eyes on Jesus and view the world through the lens of His truth. In doing so, we will not only find clarity and purpose but also reflect His light to those around us.

May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, and may you know the breadth, length, height, and depth of His love.

A Biblical Worldview, Part 1: Epistemology — Knowing the Truth in a World of Confusion

(Building on the foundational post, "A Biblical Worldview: Seeing Life Through the Lens of Truth")

Every day, we are flooded with competing ideas about truth. From news headlines to social media debates, from classrooms to conversations, everyone seems to have their own version of reality. "Your truth," "my truth," and "live your truth" have become common phrases in our culture. Yet for followers of Jesus Christ, truth is not a matter of preference or perspective—it is a Person.

What Is Epistemology?

Epistemology is the study of knowledge—how we know what we know, and how we determine what is true. A Biblical worldview begins here, with the conviction that truth exists and that God is the source of it. Without that foundation, all understanding becomes unstable, like building a house on shifting sand.

Jesus declared,

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me."

— John 14:6 (NASB)

Truth, therefore, is not just an abstract concept or a collection of facts. Truth is embodied in Christ Himself. To know Him is to know what is real, what is right, and what endures.

The Source of All Truth

The Bible consistently presents God as the fountain of knowledge and wisdom:

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

— Proverbs 9:10 (NASB)

Human reasoning, experience, and observation are valuable gifts, but they are not ultimate. Apart from God's revelation, our understanding is limited and easily deceived. Sin clouds our perception, distorting how we see the world and even ourselves.

That is why Scripture is essential. It is God's revealed truth, the lens through which all other knowledge must be tested:

"All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man or woman of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work."

— 2 Timothy 3:16–17 (NASB)

If we want to know what is true—about God, humanity, morality, or the world—we begin by submitting our minds to His Word. It is both reliable and sufficient, revealing what we could never discover on our own.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

Even with the Scriptures in hand, we need divine help to truly understand them. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide His followers into all truth:

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come."

— John 16:13 (NASB)

This means that knowing the truth is not merely an academic exercise—it is a spiritual relationship. The same God who inspired Scripture now illuminates it for believers. He opens our eyes, renews our minds, and shapes our hearts so that we can think, feel, and live in alignment with His truth.

The Battle for Truth

From the Garden of Eden onward, every generation has faced a battle over what is true. The serpent's first words to Eve were, "Did God really say…?" (Genesis 3:1).

That question still echoes through every temptation, philosophy, and ideology that challenges God's authority.

Modern culture often denies the very concept of absolute truth, claiming that each person determines their own reality. Yet when truth becomes subjective, morality collapses, justice is corrupted, and meaning evaporates. Jesus described this condition clearly:

"Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice."

— John 18:37 (NASB)

Pilate's cynical response—"What is truth?"—revealed the same confusion that pervades our world today. When people reject God's voice, they are left adrift in uncertainty.

But those who listen to Christ find solid ground. The truth of God is not only knowable—it is liberating:

"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

— John 8:32 (NASB)

Truth That Transforms

A Biblical approach to knowledge doesn't end with intellectual assent. It transforms life. Jesus said,

"Everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock."

— Matthew 7:24 (NASB)

To know the truth is to live it. Biblical truth reshapes our values, relationships, priorities, and decisions. It moves from our heads to our hearts, and from our hearts to our hands.

When we know that God's Word is true, we can stand firm even when culture shifts. We can speak truth with compassion, discern deception with clarity, and live with peace in a world of chaos.

Truth in a Relativistic Age

It can be tempting to soften the edges of truth to fit in with the world's values. But Scripture warns that a diluted gospel loses its power. Paul urged believers,

"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ."

— Colossians 2:8 (NASB)

We are not called to be arrogant or dismissive, but we must be discerning. A Biblical worldview doesn't fear truth from any source—it simply recognizes that all truth, wherever found, ultimately points back to God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things.

Living in the Light of Truth

To live by faith is to walk in the light of what God has revealed, even when the world around us prefers darkness. John wrote,

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

— 1 John 1:6–7 (NASB)

Living in truth means walking in integrity. It means letting God's Word be the standard by which we measure everything—our choices, our emotions, our worldview, and even our doubts.

Conclusion: Anchored in God's Truth

Epistemology asks, "How do we know what is true?" The Biblical answer is simple yet profound: we know the truth because God has spoken, and He has revealed Himself through His Word and through His Son.

When our understanding is grounded in that reality, we can navigate life's uncertainties with confidence. The winds of culture may blow, but our foundation remains unshakable.

May we, like the psalmist, say with full conviction:

"The sum of Your word is truth,

And every one of Your righteous judgments is everlasting."

— Psalm 119:160 (NASB)

Truth is not merely something to know; it is Someone to trust. And when we build our lives on Him, we will never be moved.

A Biblical Worldview, Part 2: Metaphysics - Nature of Reality and the God Who Is

(Building on the foundational post, "A Biblical Worldview: Seeing Life Through the Lens of Truth")

Every worldview must answer the question, "What is real?" This is the realm of metaphysics—the study of being, existence, and the ultimate nature of reality. In a Biblical worldview, this question does not begin with the universe or with humanity, but with God Himself. Reality is not self-existent or self-explanatory. It is grounded in the eternal, unchanging, personal God who is.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

— Genesis 1:1 (NASB)

These simple opening words of Scripture declare more than the start of a story—they reveal the foundation of all that is. Everything that exists owes its being to the God who has always been.

The God Who Is

Before there was time, matter, or space, there was God. When Moses asked for God's name, the Lord replied,

"I AM WHO I AM."

— Exodus 3:14 (NASB)

God alone is self-existent. He depends on nothing and no one. He is not merely part of reality—He is the source of all reality. Every other being, from galaxies to grains of sand, from angels to atoms, exists only because He sustains it.

The apostle Paul affirmed this truth in his sermon at the Areopagus:

"For in Him we live and move and exist."

— Acts 17:28 (NASB)

Reality, therefore, is not impersonal or random. It is personal, purposeful, and relational because it flows from the very nature of God. He is the ultimate reality—unchanging, eternal, and perfectly good.

Reality Reflects Its Creator

Because God is the Creator, all of creation bears the imprint of His character. The world is not an illusion or an accident; it is an ordered, intelligible expression of divine wisdom.

"The heavens are telling of the glory of God;

And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands."

— Psalm 19:1 (NASB)

We live in a world where physical and spiritual realities coexist. What we can see and measure is real—but it is not all there is. Scripture constantly reminds us that invisible realities are just as true as visible ones:

"For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible… all things have been created through Him and for Him."

— Colossians 1:16 (NASB)

To deny the spiritual dimension of reality is to miss half the story. The unseen world of angels, souls, and God's own presence gives ultimate meaning to the seen world. The physical is not inferior—it is simply the stage on which God's eternal purposes unfold.

The Distortions of a Godless Metaphysic

Modern culture often presents two distorted pictures of reality.

1. Materialism says that only the physical world exists—what we can touch, test, and measure. In this view, life is nothing more than the product of blind chance, and meaning is an illusion.

2. Pantheism swings to the opposite extreme, claiming that everything is divine—that God and the universe are one and the same. This view blurs the

Creator-creation distinction, leaving no room for a personal, holy God or for moral accountability.

The Biblical worldview rejects both distortions. God is distinct from His creation, yet intimately involved with it. He is transcendent (above and beyond all things) and immanent (present and active within all things).

"Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the Lord.

— Jeremiah 23:24 (NASB)

Christ at the Center of Reality

In Jesus Christ, the eternal God entered His own creation. The One who holds all things together took on flesh and dwelt among us.

"He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."

— Colossians 1:17 (NASB)

This means that all of reality ultimately centers on Him. The laws of nature, the flow of history, and the destiny of every soul all converge in Christ. He is both the Creator and the Redeemer, the Alpha and the Omega (Revelation 22:13).

A Biblical metaphysic, then, is not abstract philosophy—it is Christology. To understand what is real, we look to Jesus, in whom "all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9).

Living in Light of Reality

Because reality is grounded in God, our daily lives take on deep significance. Every moment, every decision, and every relationship matters. We are not wandering through a meaningless universe; we are living within a story authored by God Himself.

This truth shapes how we respond to both joy and suffering. When life feels chaotic, we remember that the Creator who spoke galaxies into existence also holds our hearts in His hands. He is not distant. He is near, sustaining and guiding all things toward His ultimate purpose.

“The Lord has established His throne in the heavens,

And His sovereignty rules over all.”

— Psalm 103:19 (NASB)

Reality is not determined by our emotions or our circumstances but by the eternal character of God. What He has declared to be true remains true, no matter how the world changes.

The Call to Worship and Wonder

Understanding metaphysics from a Biblical perspective should lead us not to pride, but to praise. The more deeply we grasp the reality of God’s being, the more we are moved to awe and worship.

Paul expressed this beautifully:

“Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!”

— Romans 11:33 (NASB)

The reality that undergirds the universe is not cold or mechanical—it is love. The same God who hung the stars also numbers our hairs and knows our thoughts. His reality is relational, inviting us to live in communion with Him.

Conclusion: Anchored in the God Who Is

Metaphysics asks, “What is real?” The Biblical answer is profoundly simple: God is real, and everything else derives its reality from Him.

To live with this awareness is to see the world as sacred, purposeful, and filled with divine presence. It is to walk through each day with reverence, knowing that “the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord” (Psalm 33:5).

When we align our understanding of reality with the God who is, our fears fade, our worship deepens, and our purpose becomes clear.

“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.

To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

— Romans 11:36 (NASB)

A Biblical Worldview, Part 3: Cosmology — A Universe Declaring the Glory of God

(Building on the foundational post, "A Biblical Worldview: Seeing Life Through the Lens of Truth")

When we look up at the night sky—whether through a telescope or with the naked eye—we are reminded of how small we are and how vast the universe is. But from a Biblical worldview, that vastness does not make us insignificant. It makes God magnificent. The study of cosmology, which explores the origin, nature, and purpose of the universe, leads the believer not merely to curiosity, but to worship.

"The heavens are telling of the glory of God;

And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands."

— Psalm 19:1 (NASB)

The universe is not a random accident of matter and energy. It is a masterpiece of divine intention—a vast, ordered testimony to the Creator's power, wisdom, and love.

Creation by the Word of God

At the heart of a Biblical cosmology stands this declaration:

"By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,

And by the breath of His mouth all their host."

— Psalm 33:6 (NASB)

Everything came into being because God spoke. From galaxies to grass, from the orbits of planets to the beating of a human heart, all things owe their existence to the creative Word.

Genesis 1 presents this reality simply: "And God said… and it was so." The power of His Word brought forth light, life, and order from nothingness. This creative act

reveals that the universe is not eternal, nor is it self-generating—it is entirely dependent on the One who made it.

"All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."

— John 1:3 (NASB)

Christ Himself is the Logos, the divine Word through whom the Father created and through whom all things continue to hold together (Colossians 1:16-17).

An Ordered and Purposeful Universe

The more science uncovers about the cosmos, the more evidence it provides of intricate design. From the finely tuned constants of physics to the precise chemical balance required for life, the universe reflects careful order rather than chaos.

The Bible does not speak in scientific language, yet it continually affirms that creation is both structured and sustained by divine wisdom:

"The Lord by wisdom founded the earth,

By understanding He established the heavens."

— Proverbs 3:19 (NASB)

The laws of nature are not impersonal—they are expressions of the consistent faithfulness of the Lawgiver. The sun rises because He decreed it so (Jeremiah 33:20–21). Gravity, motion, and time all operate according to His command.

The Universe Exists for God's Glory

Modern cosmology often focuses on how the universe began, but Scripture focuses on why. Creation exists not for its own sake, nor for ours alone, but for the glory of God.

"For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

— Romans 11:36 (NASB)

Every sunrise, every mountain range, every ocean wave, and every star is part of a cosmic symphony declaring His majesty. The universe itself is an act of worship—a stage for God's beauty and a mirror of His excellence.

Isaiah reminds us:

"Lift up your eyes on high

And see who has created these stars,

The One who brings out their multitude by number,

He calls them all by name."

— Isaiah 40:26 (NASB)

That same Creator who names the stars also knows each of our names (John 10:3). His vastness does not make Him distant; it magnifies His care.

Humanity's Place in the Cosmos

The biblical view of cosmology places humanity in a unique position within creation—not as masters of the universe, but as caretakers. God entrusted the earth to our stewardship:

"Then God said, 'Let Us make mankind in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the livestock and over all the earth…'"

— Genesis 1:26 (NASB)

This dominion is not domination; it is responsibility. The universe is God's creation, and we are called to manage it in reverence, not exploit it in greed. Every act of stewardship—protecting life, cultivating the land, caring for others—reflects the Creator's heart.

To mistreat creation is to misunderstand its purpose. The earth is not sacred in itself, but it is sacred because it belongs to God.

“The earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains,

The world, and those who live in it.”

— Psalm 24:1 (NASB)

Creation and Redemption: The Cosmic Story

The story of the universe does not end in Genesis. Just as sin corrupted humanity, it also brought brokenness into creation. Paul writes that “the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now” (Romans 8:22).

But the story moves toward redemption. The same God who created the heavens and the earth will one day renew them. Revelation gives us this promise:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away.”

— Revelation 21:1 (NASB)

God’s plan is not to abandon His creation but to restore it. The universe began with His Word and will be completed by His Word. The final act of His redemptive plan will be the unveiling of a new, perfect creation where righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13).

The Call to Wonder and Worship

Cosmology, rightly understood, leads not to pride but to humility; not to speculation, but to adoration. When Job questioned God’s justice, the Lord responded by revealing His creative majesty:

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell Me, if you have understanding.”

— Job 38:4 (NASB)

Confronted with the grandeur of creation, Job could only respond with repentance and awe. Likewise, when we see the beauty and order of the universe, our proper response is worship.

“Come, let us worship and bow down,

Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.”

— Psalm 95:6 (NASB)

The more deeply we understand the cosmos, the more deeply we should marvel at its Creator.

Conclusion: The Universe Declares His Glory

Cosmology asks, “What is the nature and purpose of the universe?” The Biblical answer is clear: the universe is God’s handiwork, designed to reveal His glory and to serve His purposes.

Every star that burns and every heartbeat that beats proclaims the same truth—God is worthy.

“Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power;

for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”

— Revelation 4:11 (NASB)

When we see creation through this lens, life is filled with meaning. The same power that flung the galaxies into space now dwells in us through His Spirit. And one day, all creation will sing in harmony again, declaring the glory of the One who made it all.

A Biblical Worldview, Part 4: Teleology — Living Toward God's Ultimate Purpose

(Building on the foundational post, "A Biblical Worldview: Seeing Life Through the Lens of Truth")

Every worldview must ultimately answer the question, "Why?" Why does anything exist? Why are we here? What is the purpose of it all?

This question leads us into the realm of teleology—the study of purpose, design, and destiny. For the follower of Christ, the answer is neither abstract nor self-centered. Scripture teaches that all things exist for God's glory. Life's meaning is not discovered by looking inward, but upward.

"For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.

To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

— Romans 11:36 (NASB)

Purpose Begins with God

In a Biblical worldview, purpose flows from the nature of God Himself. He is not only the Creator of all things, but the One who imbues creation with meaning. The universe is not a cosmic accident—it is a divine intention.

Human philosophy often looks for purpose in human achievement, pleasure, or progress. Yet without reference to God, those pursuits end in futility. As Solomon observed in Ecclesiastes, all is "vanity and striving after wind" when disconnected from God (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

The Bible instead begins with this foundation:

"The Lord has made everything for its own purpose."

— Proverbs 16:4 (NASB)

Every atom, every life, every moment exists by design. God's purposes extend from the smallest detail to the grand sweep of history.

The Purpose of Creation

God did not create the world because He lacked something or needed companionship. The triune God was already complete in love and joy. Rather, He created out of the overflow of His goodness and for the display of His glory.

"Everyone who is called by My name,

And whom I have created for My glory,

Whom I have formed, even whom I have made."

— Isaiah 43:7 (NASB)

The heavens declare His glory (Psalm 19:1), and humanity—made in His image—is meant to reflect that glory back to Him. When creation functions as God intended, it becomes a mirror of His majesty.

Teleology, then, is not just about our purpose but about God's purpose. All creation exists to glorify Him, and all history moves toward the fulfillment of His redemptive plan.

The Purpose of Redemption

When sin entered the world, humanity's sense of purpose fractured. Instead of living for God's glory, people began living for self. Yet God's plan of redemption restores us to our original purpose.

"He predestined us to adoption as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace."

— Ephesians 1:5–6 (NASB)

The cross of Christ reveals the ultimate purpose of history: the reconciliation of all things to God (Colossians 1:19–20). Salvation is not merely about escaping judgment; it is about being restored to the purpose for which we were made—to love, worship, and serve God forever.

As Paul writes,

“We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

— Ephesians 2:10 (NASB)

Redeemed people live purposeful lives because they are participants in God’s ongoing story of grace.

The Futility of a Godless Purpose

Modern culture tells us to “find your own purpose” or “create your own meaning.” But this approach leaves us chasing what cannot satisfy. Without God, purpose becomes temporary, fragile, and often self-destructive.

When the center of purpose is self, the end is emptiness. When the center is God, the end is joy.

Jesus warned of this inversion when He said,

“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?”

— Mark 8:36 (NASB)

Purpose without God may look impressive for a season, but it will not endure. Only what is rooted in eternity bears lasting fruit.

Our Purpose in Christ

For believers, teleology is not a mystery to be solved but a relationship to be lived. Jesus revealed the purpose of life in one simple statement:

“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

— John 17:3 (NASB)

To know God is to know purpose. To walk with Him is to find direction. Every vocation, every calling, every season of life gains significance when it is aligned with this ultimate aim—to glorify God and enjoy His fellowship.

Paul captures this beautifully:

"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

— 1 Corinthians 10:31 (NASB)

Our lives become worship when we live with this awareness. Work, family, service, and rest are all sacred when done for Him.

The End Toward Which All Things Move

Biblical teleology looks not only to the beginning but to the end. The story of creation moves toward consummation—when Christ returns and God's purposes are fulfilled in full.

"For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow… and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

— Philippians 2:9–11 (NASB)

History is not cyclical or meaningless; it is linear and purposeful. It began in creation, was redeemed at the cross, and will be completed in Christ's return. The final chapter of teleology is worship—every creature acknowledging the sovereignty and goodness of God.

Living in Light of Eternal Purpose

When we grasp that our purpose is bound up in God's glory, our perspective changes. Suffering becomes a context for faithfulness. Success becomes an opportunity for gratitude. Every trial, every joy, every breath becomes part of a larger tapestry woven by the hand of God.

"We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

— Romans 8:28 (NASB)

This confidence enables us to live with peace in uncertainty and courage in adversity. Life is not meaningless; it is deeply intentional.

Conclusion: Living for His Glory

Teleology asks, "What is the purpose and destiny of everything?" The Biblical answer is this: all things exist to glorify God.

To live with this understanding is to live with freedom and focus. We no longer need to invent purpose; we are invited to participate in God's.

"The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord,

As the waters cover the sea."

— Habakkuk 2:14 (NASB)

When that day comes, every redeemed heart will echo the cry of heaven:

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing."

— Revelation 5:12 (NASB)

Until then, may we live each day for His glory—finding our meaning, our mission, and our joy in the One who made all things and holds them together.

A Biblical Worldview, Part 5: Theology — Knowing the God Who Reveals Himself

(Building on the foundational post, "A Biblical Worldview: Seeing Life Through the Lens of Truth")

At the center of every worldview is a view of God. Whether people acknowledge Him or not, their understanding of who—or what—is ultimate shapes how they interpret everything else. Theology, therefore, is not an abstract academic pursuit; it is the heart of all truth.

The word theology simply means "the study of God." But a Biblical worldview begins with the recognition that God cannot be discovered by human speculation. He must reveal Himself. And He has.

"Thus says the Lord:

'Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might,

let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let the one who boasts boast of this,

that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises mercy, justice, and righteousness on the earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the Lord."

— Jeremiah 9:23–24 (NASB)

To know God is life's highest privilege and its deepest purpose.

God Revealed, Not Invented

Every culture has produced ideas about the divine, yet human imagination cannot grasp the true God. Left to ourselves, we make gods in our own image—gods who serve our desires rather than call us to holiness.

But the God of Scripture reveals Himself truthfully, consistently, and graciously. He makes Himself known through:

1. Creation — “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1). Nature reveals His power and creativity.

2. Conscience — “The work of the Law is written in their hearts” (Romans 2:15). Our moral awareness points to a moral Lawgiver.

3. Christ — “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Jesus is the perfect and personal revelation of God.

4. Scripture — “All Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible is God’s authoritative self-disclosure in words.

We do not define God; He defines Himself. Our task is not to reshape Him to fit modern sensibilities, but to humbly receive what He has revealed.

The Nature of God

The Bible paints a portrait of a God who is both infinite and intimate—awesome in majesty, yet near in mercy. Several core truths stand out:

- God is eternal. “Before the mountains were born… from everlasting to everlasting, You are God” (Psalm 90:2). He had no beginning and will have no end.

- God is holy. “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of armies” (Isaiah 6:3). His purity sets Him apart from all creation.

- God is love. “God is love” (1 John 4:8). His nature is not cold detachment but perfect self-giving.

- God is just. “All His ways are justice” (Deuteronomy 32:4). He cannot ignore evil or compromise righteousness.

- God is sovereign. “Whatever the Lord pleases, He does” (Psalm 135:6). Nothing lies outside His authority.

- God is personal. He speaks, listens, feels compassion, and invites relationship. He is not an impersonal force, but the living Lord.

These attributes do not compete with one another; they harmonize in perfect unity. God's justice is loving. His love is holy. His holiness is good.

The Trinity: One God in Three Persons

The most profound mystery of theology is that God is both one and three—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This truth is not a contradiction but a revelation of divine fullness.

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

— Matthew 28:19 (NASB)

The Father plans, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit applies the work of redemption. The triune God is eternally relational; love existed before creation because love has always existed within God Himself.

When we are saved, we are drawn into that divine fellowship: "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

The Self-Revealing God in Jesus Christ

God's ultimate self-disclosure came not in thunder or tablets, but in a Person.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God… and the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us."

— John 1:1, 14 (NASB)

In Jesus, the invisible God became visible. He healed the sick, forgave sins, calmed storms, and laid down His life for His enemies. Every act of Christ is a revelation of the Father's heart.

"For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him."

— Colossians 1:19 (NASB)

To see Jesus is to see what God is like: compassionate yet truthful, humble yet sovereign, righteous yet merciful. Through Christ's death and resurrection, we

know beyond doubt that God is both holy enough to judge sin and loving enough to bear it Himself.

The God Who Desires Relationship

Theology is not merely about information; it is about relationship. The God of the Bible does not remain distant from His creation. He calls us to know Him personally.

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."

— James 4:8 (NASB)

From the first garden to the final city, Scripture tells a relational story—God walking with His people. His desire is not for religious performance but for covenant love. Jesus described eternal life not as a place, but as a relationship:

"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

— John 17:3 (NASB)

Knowing God transforms everything: how we think, how we love, how we live.

The Consequences of Ignoring God

When theology is ignored or distorted, everything else collapses. If we get God wrong, we get everything wrong—truth, morality, meaning, and hope. Paul described this tragic exchange:

"They exchanged the truth of God for falsehood, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator."

— Romans 1:25 (NASB)

A world that rejects God inevitably replaces Him with idols—whether lesser being, material wealth, pleasure, or self. But these false gods cannot satisfy or save. Only the true and living God can fill the human heart.

Worship: The Proper Response to Theology

The goal of theology is not debate but doxology—not argument, but awe. When we behold who God is, worship naturally flows.

"Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"

— Romans 11:33 (NASB)

Right theology leads to right worship. And right worship leads to right living. When we see God rightly, we see everything else rightly.

Conclusion: Knowing the God Who Reveals Himself

Theology asks, "Who is God, and what is He like?" The Biblical answer is that He is holy, loving, just, and personal—and He has made Himself known through His Word and through His Son.

The study of God is not a theoretical exercise; it is the pursuit of life itself. To know Him is to find the source of wisdom, the foundation of truth, and the fullness of joy.

"You will make known to me the way of life;

In Your presence is fullness of joy;

In Your right hand there are pleasures forever."

— Psalm 16:11 (NASB)

May our theology always lead us to worship, and may our worship always deepen our theology. For the more we know Him, the more we love Him—and the more clearly we reflect His glory in the world He made.

A Biblical Worldview, Part 6: Anthropology — Created in His Image for His Glory

(Building on the foundational post, "A Biblical Worldview: Seeing Life Through the Lens of Truth")

Few questions shape how we live more profoundly than this one: What does it mean to be human? The way we answer determines how we view identity, dignity, purpose, morality, and relationships. Scripture provides a clear and hopeful answer —one that contrasts sharply with the confusion of our age.

In Biblical terms, anthropology is not simply the study of human cultures or behavior. It is the study of humanity as God created, defined, and redeemed us. To know who we are, we must first know whose we are.

"Then God said, 'Let Us make mankind in Our image, according to Our likeness…'

So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him;

male and female He created them."

— Genesis 1:26–27 (NASB)

At the very beginning of Scripture, before sin entered the world, God declared our identity: we are image bearers of the living God.

The Image of God: Our Origin and Identity

To be made in God's image (*imago Dei*) means that every human being, regardless of background, ability, or circumstance, possesses inherent dignity and worth. Our value does not come from what we do but from who made us.

"What is man that You think of him,

And a son of man that You are concerned about him?"

— Psalm 8:4 (NASB)

Unlike the rest of creation, humanity was formed personally by God's hand and enlivened by His breath (Genesis 2:7). We are not the product of chance or the descendants of chaos—we are the intentional craftsmanship of a loving Creator.

Because we bear His image, we reflect certain aspects of His character: the capacity to reason, to love, to create, to rule, and to relate. We were designed for communion—with God and with one another.

Male and Female: Divine Design, Not Human Construction

In Genesis 1:27, God's creation of humanity as "male and female" reveals that gender is not an accident or a social construct—it is a divine gift. Each sex reflects different facets of God's nature, and together they form a complementary unity designed to reflect His image.

This truth stands as a countercultural anchor in a world increasingly confused about identity. To honor God's design for humanity is to affirm both equality and distinction, both dignity and purpose.

"God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good."

— Genesis 1:31 (NASB)

Humanity, as God intended and created it, was beautiful—whole, innocent, and good.

The Fall: The Distortion of the Image

Yet, the story of humanity does not remain in Genesis 1. In Genesis 3, sin entered the world through disobedience, corrupting the heart of man and marring the divine image within.

"Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all mankind."

— Romans 5:12 (NASB)

Though the image of God in us was defaced, it was not destroyed. Every human being still bears that divine imprint, even in brokenness. But apart from Christ, we

are spiritually dead—estranged from the God whose likeness we were made to reflect.

This separation explains the turmoil of human history and the restlessness of the human heart. As Augustine wrote, "You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

Redemption: The Restoration of the Image

The good news of the gospel is that in Christ, what was broken can be restored. Jesus came not only to save sinners but to renew the image of God within them.

"You have put on the new self, which is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created it."

— Colossians 3:10 (NASB)

Through faith in Jesus, we are made new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Spirit of God transforms us day by day, conforming us more and more to the likeness of Christ—the perfect image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15).

Where sin brought alienation, Christ brings reconciliation. Where sin distorted our purpose, Christ restores it. The redeemed person can now live out their true humanity—loving God, serving others, and exercising stewardship over creation.

Humanity's Calling: Reflecting God's Character

Being made in God's image carries both privilege and responsibility. Humanity was commissioned to represent God's rule on earth:

"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and every living thing that moves on the earth."

— Genesis 1:28 (NASB)

This mandate involves stewardship, creativity, and care. We are to cultivate the world, not exploit it. Work itself is not a curse—it is part of our design. When done unto the Lord, even ordinary tasks become acts of worship.

Likewise, relationships are central to our calling. We are designed for community because God Himself exists in eternal relationship—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Isolation is contrary to our created nature; love and fellowship express the heart of God.

The Dignity of Every Human Life

Because every person bears the image of God, every life has immeasurable worth. From the unborn child to the elderly, from the powerful to the marginalized, every human being reflects something of the Creator's glory.

This truth forms the foundation of biblical ethics and social justice. It is why Christians are called to protect life, to oppose injustice, and to love even their enemies.

"With [the tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people, who have been made in the likeness of God.

From the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, these things should not be this way."

— James 3:9–10 (NASB)

To mistreat another human being is to dishonor the God whose image that person bears.

Our Eternal Destiny: Perfected in His Presence

Anthropology is incomplete without eschatology—the study of our ultimate destiny. One day, the work of restoration will be finished. We shall see Christ as He is, and in seeing Him, we will become like Him.

"We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is."

— 1 John 3:2 (NASB)

The redeemed humanity of the new creation will reflect the image of God perfectly, untainted by sin or sorrow. Every culture, tribe, and tongue will join together in worship before the throne of the Lamb (Revelation 7:9–10).

Conclusion: Created in His Image, Restored for His Glory

Anthropology asks, "What is the nature and purpose of humankind?" The Biblical answer is clear: we were created in God's image, for His glory, and redeemed by His grace.

Our identity is not found in our achievements, possessions, or self-perceptions, but in the One who formed us. Our purpose is not self-fulfillment, but God-glorification.

"For You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

— Revelation 4:11 (NASB)

To live as image bearers is to live in love, holiness, and service—reflecting the character of our Creator in every sphere of life. In Christ, we rediscover what it truly means to be human: to know God, to bear His likeness, and to glorify Him forever.

A Biblical Worldview, Part 7: Axiology — Finding True Value, Beauty, and Goodness in God

(Building on the foundational post, "A Biblical Worldview: Seeing Life Through the Lens of Truth")

What makes something good, beautiful, or worthwhile? How do we determine what is right or wrong, valuable or worthless, lovely or corrupt? These questions lead us into axiology—the study of value, including ethics (what is morally good) and aesthetics (what is truly beautiful).

Every worldview has an axiology, even if unspoken. Our sense of value directs our choices, priorities, and pursuits. In a Biblical worldview, all true goodness, beauty, and worth flow from the character of God. He is not only the source of value—He is the standard of it.

"You are good and do good;

Teach me Your statutes."

— Psalm 119:68 (NASB)

God as the Standard of Goodness

Goodness is not determined by human opinion or cultural consensus. What is good is what aligns with the nature of God Himself. He is perfectly righteous, utterly just, and infinitely loving.

When Moses asked to see God's glory, the Lord revealed Himself not in abstract power, but in moral splendor:

"The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in faithfulness and truth."

— Exodus 34:6 (NASB)

God's goodness defines all other goodness. Because He is unchanging, moral truth is not relative or shifting. Right and wrong are not negotiable—they are reflections of His eternal character.

“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”

— James 1:17 (NASB)

When we speak of moral values, then, we are not speaking about social trends or personal feelings, but about conformity to the will of a holy God.

The Moral Order of God’s World

God created the universe with moral order as surely as He created it with physical order. The Ten Commandments, the teachings of Jesus, and the moral principles found throughout Scripture reveal what life looks like when aligned with His design.

To love God and to love our neighbor is not merely a rule—it is the essence of goodness.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind… and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

— Matthew 22:37–39 (NASB)

These two commands summarize the moral fabric of reality. When we love God, we reflect His nature; when we love others, we honor His image in them.

Conversely, sin is the rejection of that order—the attempt to define good and evil apart from God, as Adam and Eve did in Eden. Every moral breakdown, personal or societal, begins with that same rebellion: “We will decide for ourselves what is good.”

The Cross: The Convergence of Goodness and Justice

The clearest revelation of God’s goodness is found not in creation’s beauty but in the cross of Christ. There, divine love and divine justice meet.

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

— Romans 5:8 (NASB)

At Calvary, the holiness of God required judgment for sin, and the mercy of God provided the payment. The result was not compromise but perfect righteousness satisfied through perfect love.

Every definition of goodness must bow before the cross. It is there we learn that what is truly good often involves sacrifice, humility, and self-giving love. The world prizes pleasure and power; God reveals goodness through purity and grace.

The Beauty of Holiness

In a Biblical worldview, beauty is not merely aesthetic—it is moral and spiritual. The phrase "the beauty of holiness" (Psalm 96:9) reminds us that what is truly beautiful reflects God's nature.

Our culture often celebrates beauty divorced from goodness, valuing appearance over virtue. But God sees differently. The most beautiful life is one shaped by the Spirit, radiating the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

When we behold holiness, we glimpse beauty in its purest form. Isaiah's vision of God on His throne left him undone not because of external splendor, but because of moral majesty:

"Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of armies;

The whole earth is full of His glory."

— Isaiah 6:3 (NASB)

Beauty is therefore not skin deep—it is soul deep. It is the radiance of divine goodness reflected in the lives of those who walk with God.

True Value in a World of Counterfeits

Axiology confronts us with the difference between what seems valuable and what truly is. The world teaches us to treasure wealth, success, and status, but Scripture calls us to higher treasures: faith, hope, and love.

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

— Matthew 6:21 (NASB)

Jesus described the kingdom of heaven as a treasure hidden in a field, worth selling everything to obtain (Matthew 13:44). To live wisely is to reorder our affections so that what God values, we value.

Paul expressed this shift powerfully:

“Whatever things were gain to me, these things I have counted as loss because of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

— Philippians 3:7–8 (NASB)

When Christ becomes our greatest treasure, we finally understand true value. Everything else takes its rightful place beneath Him.

The Restoration of Beauty and Goodness

Sin disfigures what God made good and beautiful, but redemption restores it. The gospel not only forgives—it transforms. It reorients our sense of value from the temporal to the eternal, from the visible to the unseen.

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

— 2 Corinthians 4:18 (NASB)

One day, when Christ returns, all creation will again radiate perfect goodness and beauty. Evil will be banished, corruption undone, and every redeemed soul will shine with the glory of God.

“He will beautify the afflicted ones with salvation.”

— Psalm 149:4 (NASB)

Living by the Values of the Kingdom

To embrace a Biblical axiology is to live by eternal values in a temporary world. It means choosing what pleases God over what pleases self. It means valuing integrity over convenience, truth over popularity, purity over pleasure, and compassion over comfort.

Paul's exhortation captures this beautifully:

"Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

— Philippians 4:8 (NASB)

When our hearts dwell on what God delights in, our lives become conduits of His goodness and beauty.

Conclusion: The Source and Summit of All Value

Axiology asks, "What is truly good, valuable, and beautiful?" The Biblical answer is simple yet inexhaustible: God Himself.

He is the source of goodness, the standard of beauty, and the giver of all that is valuable. Everything of true worth finds its meaning in relationship with Him.

"Taste and see that the Lord is good;

How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!"

— Psalm 34:8 (NASB)

To know God is to know what is good. To love God is to love what is beautiful. To follow God is to live a life of lasting value.

May we, then, set our hearts on what is eternal, our minds on what is pure, and our lives on what is pleasing to Him—until the day when we behold the glory of His goodness face to face.

Persecution and Suffering (P&S) Series - Curtis Sergeant - 2017

I am starting a series of posts on the topic of persecution and suffering. I believe this is an important topic that the church today (especially in the West) does not pay enough attention to. I would say that this is important because it is a major topic of Scripture. I also believe it is a major way the Lord grows us as disciples. In fact, I propose there is more said about how we can grow through persecution and suffering than about how we can grow through Scripture, prayer, and "body life" combined.

I want to make it clear that I am talking about persecution and suffering for doing what is right, not persecution and suffering for the sake of correction or for stupid things we might do. It is entirely possible to suffer for doing wrong. Having said that, many of the benefits that come from our proper response to suffering for doing what is right can also accrue to us even as a result of suffering we bring upon ourselves if we respond appropriately.

The major focus of this series is to help us to recognize those intended or possible benefits and respond well to the suffering we experience. In that way, the suffering will not be wasted. If we respond poorly then the enemy and the kingdom of darkness will achieve their purpose through it God has good intentions for us in all the suffering He allows. If we respond appropriately, we will be blessed as we experience the good He intends for us. Let's cooperate with His intentions for our own good and for the sake of the Kingdom and the King. In Scripture quotations I will denote portions that guide us in our proper response to suffering in green highlighting, and those portions that speak to the resulting blessings in yellow highlighting.

Post 1:

I have been in several settings among believers where everyone was sharing their favorite Bible promises. Never once on those occasions did anyone mention 2 Timothy 3:12, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Though we may not particularly favor this verse, it actually is a great and even desirable promise because of what its result will be.

Even beyond the positive results, it also can be evidence that we are on the right track in desiring and living a godly life in Christ Jesus. If we are only experiencing a life of ease, we can suspect that we are not posing a threat to the enemy, to the kingdom of darkness. If we are a threat to the enemy, we will face opposition from him. We are targets. The enemy has a purpose for these attacks, and it is to silence us. The Lord also has purposes, holy purposes. This series is about seeking to fulfill those purposes.

I am at the point in my spiritual life where I begin to wonder what I am doing wrong if I am not facing fairly difficult challenges. I find it oddly comforting to know that my temporary difficulties are resulting in eternal gain. In following the Lord whole-heartedly, we "win" no matter what the enemy may do to us.

Post 2:

Most believers are familiar with the story of Joseph. He was unfairly sold into slavery by his brothers because of their envy. He was then unfairly imprisoned for doing what was right. Then he was forgotten by someone he helped in prison. Then, in the end, the Lord elevated him to a high position in the foreign land where he was living. Later, his brothers came to purchase food from him and they did not recognize him. He made himself known to them and then he said this in Genesis 45:5-8:

"And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt."

We read nearly the same statement by Joseph years later in Genesis 50:19-21. Joseph recognized God's hand at work through all the injustice and defamation and suffering and separation from his family and homeland. He did not harbor anger or bitterness against the people who were God's instruments in all those difficulties. His focus was on doing God's work and pursuing God's purposes whether he was a slave or in prison or in a position of great power and influence. He trusted God and was content to play whatever role God had for him and trust God's goodness and timing no matter what the personal cost. May we do the same.

Post 3:

We already looked at the story of Joseph. It is an illustration of Psalm 66:10-12:
"For you, God, tested us; you refined us like silver.
You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs.
You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance."

Here the psalmist recognizes God at work in his suffering. He also recognizes God's purposes. In this case, God's purposes were to test and refine the psalmist. The means was a variety of difficulties – imprisonment, hard labor, subjugation, and either literally or figuratively, fire and flood.

Again, there is a recognition of God's complete authority and wisdom and goodness through tremendous pain and suffering. There is a trust in the Lord to bring His people through difficulties in the end and give them reward and comfort. For some that reward

and comfort may well be delayed until eternity, but the Lord is trustworthy. We can trust Him to do what is right and what is best.

Post 4:

Lamentations 3:1-57 reminds us that sometimes our suffering is because of our own sin, as God's way of punishing and correcting us:

1 I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of the LORD's wrath.
2 He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light;
3 indeed, he has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long.
4 He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones.
5 He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship.
6 He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead.
7 He has walled me in so I cannot escape; he has weighed me down with chains.
8 Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer.
9 He has barred my way with blocks of stone; he has made my paths crooked.
10 Like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in hiding,
11 he dragged me from the path and mangled me and left me without help.
12 He drew his bow and made me the target for his arrows.
13 He pierced my heart with arrows from his quiver.
14 I became the laughingstock of all my people; they mock me in song all day long.
15 He has filled me with bitter herbs and given me gall to drink.
16 He has broken my teeth with gravel; he has trampled me in the dust.
17 I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is.
18 So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD."
19 I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall.
20 I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.
21 Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:
22 Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.
23 They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
24 I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."
25 The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him;
26 it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.
27 It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young.
28 Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him.
29 Let him bury his face in the dust— there may yet be hope.
30 Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace.
31 For no one is cast off by the Lord forever.
32 Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.
33 For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone.
34 To crush underfoot all prisoners in the land,
35 to deny people their rights before the Most High,
36 to deprive them of justice— would not the Lord see such things?

37 Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it?
38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?
39 Why should the living complain when punished for their sins?
40 Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD.
41 Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven, and say:
42 "We have sinned and rebelled and you have not forgiven.
43 "You have covered yourself with anger and pursued us; you have slain without pity.
44 You have covered yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can get through.
45 You have made us scum and refuse among the nations.
46 "All our enemies have opened their mouths wide against us.
47 We have suffered terror and pitfalls, ruin and destruction."
48 Streams of tears flow from my eyes because my people are destroyed.
49 My eyes will flow unceasingly, without relief,
50 until the LORD looks down from heaven and sees.
51 What I see brings grief to my soul because of all the women of my city.
52 Those who were my enemies without cause hunted me like a bird.
53 They tried to end my life in a pit and threw stones at me;
54 the waters closed over my head, and I thought I was about to perish.
55 I called on your name, LORD, from the depths of the pit.
56 You heard my plea: "Do not close your ears to my cry for relief."
57 You came near when I called you, and you said, "Do not fear."

Even when the calamities that come upon us are due to our own sinfulness, however, Jeremiah recognizes that God's goodness and mercy are in view. Even then, the Lord is acting for our own good. This is highlighted in verses 21-25 and 31-36.

Jeremiah gives helpful guidance on how we are to respond in such situations. Note all the instructions he gives in the passage. In summary, we are to repent and believe. We are to submit to God's ways and trust Him to know what is right and to do it. We are to devote ourselves to His path and trust His timing. We are to call on Him.

Post 5:

Matthew 5:4 tells us, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." This is related to the old saying, "God afflicts the comfortable and comforts the afflicted." If we want to be on the right side of this equation for all eternity, then I would far rather face affliction now and comfort for eternity. You remember in the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 6:19-31, in verse 25 it says "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony."

In the seemingly upside-down Kingdom of God, delayed gratification is extreme. The discipline and training and testing provided by various afflictions help to prepare us for an

eternity of reaping the benefits of character and strength and soundness. This is especially true in the Kingdom of God, but we recognize similar principles even in earthly endeavors. General Norman Schwarzkopf said, "The more you sweat in peace, the less you bleed in war." The idea is that thorough and intense training prepares soldiers for greater effectiveness.

One of the personal frustrations in my life is when people misunderstand the place of "good works" in Kingdom living for the Lord. It is a plain and obvious fact that we can do nothing to earn our salvation. It is entirely free and sets us free from sin and shame and death. We can and should rejoice and relax in this wonderful blessing. Some people, however, then have a distorted view of labor for the Kingdom. They misunderstand completely its valuable and prominent role and place in a life lived for the Lord. They immediately object when anyone begins to speak of discipline and sacrifice, claiming that Jesus wants us to dance rather than march.

I propose that Jesus wants us to march with joy and love and gratitude and freedom. Here I am speaking of marching in terms of disciplined obedience to the Lord. The fact that we are free and still choose to submit to whatever He asks, whenever He asks, however He asks, is a demonstration of our great love for Him. Anyone who understands salvation knows that it has nothing to do with seeking to earn salvation. It still has a vital role, however, in living for the Kingdom. It is a demonstration of our love and obedience. It demonstrates our allegiance and devotion. It prepares us for an eternity of serving the Lord and one another.

As Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:3-4, "Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer." Let us then commit ourselves to suffering well for the Lord and His Kingdom. Let us be ready to do His will even when it means sacrifice and suffering. It is precisely our willingness to do so that shows everyone His greatness and goodness and worthiness. He is worth suffering for. We will have an eternity to dance without sacrifice or suffering.

Post 6:

Matthew 5:10 tells us, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In some way, then, the persecution of God's people is connected with their inheritance in the Kingdom. This should not be a surprise since we are promised in 2 Timothy 3:12, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

Persecution is a sign that accompanies godly living and is an evidence of our priorities and purpose in living for the King and His Kingdom rather than for ease and comfort and peace and prosperity in this world. Paul speaks of this in Galatians 1:10 when he says, "Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I

were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ." He speaks the hard and necessary truth to the Galatians and to everyone else even though he knows it will result in hardship and opposition.

The point is not that we should seek out persecution, but that we should fully do and say everything the Lord asks us to, in the way He asks us to, no matter how unpleasant the result may be for us.

Post 7:

In Matthew 5:11-12 Jesus says, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Therefore, our suffering for the sake of Christ results in our great reward in heaven.

Of course, this does not apply to suffering because of our own foolishness or wrongdoing. There are many cases, however, when the Lord asks us to do something that will result in our being maligned or mistreated or slandered or opposed. The question in those situations is whether we will obey and face the consequences or shrink back for the sake of our own reputation and well-being.

This is much the same situation as Jesus speaks about in relation to doing our righteous acts in order to be seen by men in Matthew 6:1-8: "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

You cannot have your cake and eat it to. Either you live for reward in this world or in the coming world. You cannot have it both ways. Living for the coming Kingdom means you will not be welcome in this one. Seeking the coming Kingdom means actively opposing and seeking to change the present world. That will result in opposition if we are pursuing it as we should. The wonderful news is that we will be abundantly rewarded. This is why we are told to rejoice greatly when we suffer in this way.

Post 8:

Matthew 5:38-45
"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

This is probably one of the least popular passages in the Bible. It is clear but it is not what we want to hear. In fact, in our own strength it is nearly impossible. Obedience to these commands, at least with joy, is only possible through the Holy Spirit within us.

Jesus modeled this for us, even to the point of death. In fact, even down to the details, this could be a commentary on His crucifixion. He did not resist. He turned the other cheek during His trial and its aftermath. He gave up all His clothing. He carried the cross to the point of collapse. He loved His enemies and prayed for them even while on the cross.

Jesus tells us in doing these things we will be like our Father in heaven. He demonstrated these characteristics as well, showing love to the evil and the good, regardless of their hearts or their behavior. We are to respond with this sort of equanimity and blessing as well. Our universal response to others is to be pure love regardless of how they treat us. This is how we demonstrate we are God's children.

Post 9:

Matthew 10:34-39
"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it."

The things we are willing to sacrifice for the sake of Christ reveal where He ranks in our priorities. It demonstrates our level of commitment. Is He truly the "pearl of great price"

(Matthew 13:45-46) in our estimation? Do we value Him more than any relationship and more than our own lives?

If we do, then the loss of anything for His sake will be met with pure joy because we have all we desire in Him. In Philippians 3:7-8 Paul says, "But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ."

This means we can constantly rejoice because Christ is in us and we are in Christ. No external circumstance can change this all-important reality. As Paul says elsewhere, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

In fact, it is us actually suffering loss of lesser things that proves we are His. It is in dying to ourselves that we are able to live in Him. It is in seeking Him that we lose everything else, including our own lives. The result is life - eternal, abundant, and true life.

Post 10:

Jesus speaks to His followers in Luke 9:23-25, "Then he said to them all: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?'"

Part of the very definition of being a follower of Christ is that we do not follow our own desires and preferences. By choosing to follow Jesus, we are choosing (in this earthly life), to live in a way that is uncomfortable and difficult and sacrificial and selfless. This is how Jesus lived and how He asks us to live as well.

In Philippians 2:3-8 Paul exhorts us, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 'Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!'"

Jesus then, is to be our model. One of the reasons we are left on earth after we choose to follow Christ is in order that we can be made more like Him. A major part of being conformed to His image is us learning to emulate Him in sacrificial service and humility. In suffering, if we do it willingly and with joy, we are made more like Him and are identified with Him.

Post 11:

In John 15:1-2, Jesus says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

Being "in Christ" means we will bear fruit. Fruit is evidence of His life in us. Later in this chapter in verse 8 we are told, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." At the very heart of our purpose is glorifying God. Thus, bearing fruit, even much fruit, is an indispensible aspect of our core reason for existing.

One important purpose and reason for suffering in our lives is to "prune" us so we will bear more fruit. For a time, I was a blackberry farmer. You have to be a heartless person if you are a successful blackberry farmer. Each year, from each blackberry plant, you allow only two shoots (canes) to grow. You cut off all the rest. Then you regularly prune off all branches or shoots that grow off of those two. What is left you tie off to the stake and the two wires between stakes so that all that remains is tied to those supports. That means you end up pruning about 90% of the growth. In the end, the entire plant is covered with large, luscious, delicious blackberries. The plants couldn't possibly produce that amount of fruit if the plants had not been brutally pruned. Also, the plants couldn't possibly support that amount of weight if they weren't tied inextricably along the supporting wires and stakes. The "extreme" pruning is necessary if you want to maximize fruitfulness.

I no longer farm blackberries. We do have wild blackberries in our area, however. My wife goes out each year to harvest some of them. They are much smaller and do not taste as sweet. They are also not nearly as fruitful. What takes my wife all day to harvest from wild blackberries could be harvested in five minutes from well-cultivated blackberry bushes.

In the same way, God's pruning us, through difficulties and suffering, is for our good and His glory. Therefore, we can rejoice in it.

Post 12:

In John 16:33 Jesus says, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

The good news for children of God is that suffering and persecution are only temporary. For at most one hundred years we will suffer, but then we will share in Jesus' victory over death and hell and evil for all eternity. Revelation 21:3b-4 speaks of a vision of the future when a voice from heaven announces, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

We can be of good courage, knowing this future hope is sure. We are to live in a state of peace, having this assurance. We are to be encouraged because we know how the story ends. In the end, we win with the Lord.

Post 13:

Acts 5: 40b-42 says, "They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah."

This is an example of the proper response to persecution. The enemy, Satan, has a purpose for persecution. It is to silence us. The proper response is to consider the persecution an honor and to persist in our faithful promotion of God's glory and Kingdom.
When we are persecuted for the sake of Christ it is a great honor for we are being identified with Him. The best way for us to honor Him in this situation is to continue to obey His command, His purpose, His intention, for spreading the good news that He is the King. He is a good King, a gracious King, a righteous King, a powerful King, a saving King, a worthy King, a loving King. He deserves all our love and devotion and obedience and service.

We are privileged to have the opportunity to know Him and to serve Him.
In light of this privilege to know and serve and love Him, any cost in terms of our convenience, comfort, safety, or survival is inconsequential. The importance of our relationships, our possessions or our lives is nothing in comparison to the opportunity to know and serve Him. This is the natural and normal attitude we will have toward suffering for Him if we truly understand Who He Is.

Post 14:

In Acts 8:1b-5, Luke tells us, "On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to

destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there."

Interestingly, God had clearly told His followers, via the apostles in Jerusalem, to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the end of the earth to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). They had not gone. Now, persecution arises in Jerusalem causing His followers to go out to Judea and Samaria, and still the apostles do not go. At any rate, at that time, due to the persecution, the gospel began to be spread to Judea and Samaria. This was essential for the advance of the Kingdom.

Hence we see that God can use persecution and suffering to move people where he needs them to be. This can happen on an individual level, as we have seen in a previous look at Joseph, or on a larger level such as we see here. It can be done to move the messenger of the gospel or the receivers of that message. I believe that is part of God's purpose in the massive refugee movements we are currently seeing around the world. I believe that may also be part of God's plan in many natural disasters. He seems quite willing to use temporal suffering to create opportunities for eternal blessing.

Post 15:

In 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10 Paul says, "You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."

We can see from this passage that receiving the Lord and His message in the context of severe suffering, and doing so with joy, is how we imitate the Lord, and please Him. This is also how we set an example for other believers. Paul had done this for the Thessalonians and they had in turn done that for those in the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia.

Such perseverance through suffering is inextricably intertwined with one's testimony of the gospel. It serves as irrefutable evidence of one's sincerity in turning away from any other commitment to serve God alone. It also demonstrates that He alone is worthy, that He alone is worth any amount of suffering. It points toward our unshakeable hope for eternal reward in the Lord.

Post 16:

In 1 Thessalonians 2:14-15 Paul says, "For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone."

We see from this that one's example in experiencing persecution and in responding to suffering are of value and encouragement for other followers of Christ who are undergoing the same. God's people in the churches of Judea provided a model for the churches in Thessalonica in this regard.

Our suffering and our response to it, then, helps equip other believers. We can prepare them and support them in their future suffering by responding appropriately to our current suffering. We can give them solace and hope. Indeed, we can do this for all subsequent generations. Thus, our present suffering can have a cascading benefit for God's people if we face it well.

Post 17:

In 2 Thessalonians 1:3-7 Paul says, "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels."

First, note that it is for God and His Kingdom that the Thessalonians are suffering. Secondly, the fact that they are persevering in their faith in the midst of the persecution demonstrates their increasing faith and love for one another. More than that, it shows God's righteous judgment, as it foreshadows the punishment of His enemies and eternal comfort and reward of His people.

It is by our faith and hope that we can respond now to our difficulties in such a way that proves our confidence. That faith is also increased in us and in others who observe it when we act upon it. In this way we manifest His life within us and exhibit our worthiness to inherit the Kingdom He bestows upon us. (These are Paul's words: "you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God.")

Post 18:

In 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 it says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in [any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort."

Very simply, this means that through our sufferings (and subsequent comfort from Christ) we are equipped to help others who are suffering. We have experienced, and will experience even more fully in the future, this same benefit through Christ. Ultimately, we will receive permanent and eternal comfort with Him in glory. Even in the present we experience comfort through the ministry of the Holy Spirit within us.

Therefore, both our sufferings and our comfort can result in comfort for others. Again, this is a reason for rejoicing. The only condition on others receiving this comfort is that they patiently endure. So we see again, that all these possible and intended benefits are conditional upon our appropriate response. That response is not to become bitter or angry or resentful or discouraged, but rather to patiently endure.

Post 19:

In 2 Corinthians 4:7-11 Paul writes, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body."

We can see from this passage that apparently overwhelming difficulties are to be our constant companions all along the path we walk with Christ. This is not to be something that we need to demonstrate faithfulness in on one or two occasions. It is to be a constant state as long as we are in our earthly bodies. One reason for this is because that exhibits God's power and is evidence of His greatness. His life is most clearly manifested to a watching world when we victoriously endure the greatest opposition. Impossible circumstances give opportunity to show forth His infinite power and greatness.

It is analogous to a turtle on a fencepost. If you are walking through the countryside and you see a turtle perched on a fencepost, you do not say, "My! What an amazing turtle." Instead you immediately wonder who placed the turtle on the fencepost. In the same way, God's people overcoming huge challenges and losses and sorrows serves to point people to our amazing God.

Post 20:

In 2 Corinthians 4:12-15 Paul continues, "So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. It is written: 'I believed; therefore I have spoken.' Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God."

Paul is saying the fact that he is able to endure great suffering provides an opportunity for his testimony of God's sufficiency and trustworthiness. Just as God raised Jesus from the dead, and gives strength to Paul to endure difficulties, so He will preserve His people to present them complete to Himself for all eternity. This confidence creates an opportunity for overwhelming praise and thanksgiving to be given to God for His glory. This is all the more true as greater numbers of people witness God's power in His people as they endure suffering and so should result in our thanksgiving for overwhelming circumstances.

Post 21:

In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Paul goes on, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

This is perhaps the best news of all related to our suffering in this life, and a cause for us to be encouraged in the midst of trouble. Though our bodies are being battered and crushed, and our souls are being stretched and tormented, the results for our eternal selves are wonderful. We are being strengthened. We are gaining in eternal glory and honor. We are attaining eternal benefits for our temporary pressure.

This means we need to focus on the presently invisible but enduring blessings which are accrued to us through the temporary adversities we face. Delayed gratification is essential to the life of a disciple. It is necessary for our survival and is a defining characteristic of a follower of Christ.

Post 22:

In 2 Corinthians 6:3-10 Paul says, "We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything."

Here, Paul is listing the ways he is encouraging faith in others and avoiding doing anything that might hinder people's faith. Notice how many of these items are related either to suffering or to his response to suffering. He cites these items first, before more "positive" items. Then he highlights that both have a significant role by contrasting pairs of apparently good and bad situations and closes by demonstrating the paradox of how God uses apparent negatives to bring about positive results. This is another example of the "upside down" Kingdom.

God brings good out of what His enemies intend for evil. He demonstrates His power in our weakness. He shows forth His hope and joy and love through us in circumstances the world would respond to with despair, grief and hate.

Post 23:

In 2 Corinthians 11:23-29 Paul says, "Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?"

This is an interesting passage. Paul clearly equates the degree of suffering one experiences in service to Christ as a measure of commitment to Him and service for Him. In other words, the more one suffers for the sake of Christ, the greater devotion is demonstrated

and the more fully one belongs to Him. This explains why the early followers of Christ rejoiced greatly that they were counted worthy to suffer for His Name (Acts 5:41). What we sacrifice for Christ in terms of comfort and safety and honor and security and convenience is evidence of our love for Him.

It is of note, that the internal pressures and anguish arising from love and concern for the body of Christ, are considered, perhaps, an even greater burden than the litany of external challenges. This is an expression of the fact that it is easier to suffer oneself than to see loved ones suffer. It is easier for a man to suffer than to see his wife and children suffer. The more influential one becomes in Kingdom service, the greater the spiritual family that one serves. This opens them up to concern and compassion of a much wider nature.

Early in my ministry the Lord prepared me for this type of situation. I was in an area where telephones had not been available yet. I found myself at a place where there was one of the first telephones but the person who had just moved in did not know the number of the telephone. I was sharing with my host my deep concern for a team I had just trained and sent into a very dangerous situation. Suddenly the phone rang for the first time. The host answered it. The call was for me. I assumed it was the (Communist) government, letting me know I was under surveillance. I answered it and found the call was from the team I was concerned about. They had a satellite phone. The Lord miraculously gave them the number of the place I was staying. They were calling to tell me things were going well. As soon as they delivered the message, they hung up.

The message was clear. God was telling me that He was in control. The team belonged to Him and not to me. He had called them, not me. He alone would determine if they remained safe or if they were thrown into prison. He loved them more than I did. I needed to trust Him as a faithful Creator to do what was right and best.

Many times, I have gratefully looked back on that clear lesson. Many people whom I have led to the Lord, whom I have trained, whom I have challenged to go into difficult regions, have suffered. Many people, from many countries and to many countries have been martyred for their faith. They have been held captive for years. Many have been imprisoned for years. They have been tortured in horrible and unimaginable ways. They have had their children taken from them. They have had their homes confiscated. They have been fined. They have lived for years as fugitives, constantly on the run. The weight of all that suffering would have been unbearable for me if not for the Lord's clear message to me many years ago. He is in control. We win in the end.

Post 24:

Paul makes a clear statement in 2 Corinthians 12:7b-10: "Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will

boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Every person has their own areas of weakness. For example, I have never struggled with fear as many people do, but I have battled my entire life against pride (as well as selfishness and laziness). Evidently, pride was an issue for Paul as well. Paul recognized that his "thorn in the flesh," although painful to endure, was a gift from God. It was God's tool for helping deal with Paul's pride. It showed Paul his inability to deal with it, his weakness.

As a result, Paul was able to rejoice in every "negative" thing that happened to him, knowing that God was using those things to refine his character and show the power of God in him. In fact Paul said he actually delighted in those things. Those areas of personal weakness and helplessness actually became the things he took pride in because of how they testified to God's greatness in being able to use such a weak instrument.

Post 25:

In Romans 5:3-5 Paul says, "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

This is an exceptionally encouraging list of the results of suffering. It brings about perseverance, character, and hope that will be fulfilled and will not disappoint. That hope is assured because of God's Holy Spirit and the love He has poured out within us. As a result, Paul tells us that the suffering is a cause to glory in it, or take pride in it.

We see an example of that when Paul is defending his apostleship in 2 Corinthians 11:16-33. He lists all the suffering he underwent as a basis for boasting and an evidence that he has authority.

Also, the character that is developed is something that will benefit us for all eternity. This is yet another example of how temporary pain produces eternal benefits by God's grace.

Post 26:

In Romans 8:16-18, Paul says, "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider

that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

This seems to be a strange statement. It says it is those who share in Christ's sufferings are the ones who are His heirs and will share His glory. Our suffering with Him and for Him is evidence that we belong to Him. It is this suffering, along with the Holy Spirit's testimony with our spirits, that provides the assurance that we are His.

Again, we see that the price of the suffering is more than amply rewarded by the eternal results of that suffering. The temporary pain we experience pales in comparison to the glory we will receive for all eternity. This is indeed cause for great rejoicing.

Post 27:

In Romans 8:35-39, Paul says, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

No challenge or difficulty or problem or pain or power can separate us from God's love. Paul tells us that means that we win. We are conquerors of all these tribulations. The greatness of the reward, being with God and loved by Him, makes the cost of suffering anything, more than worth it. Knowing Him and being known by Him are the ultimate reward. The more we are allowed to overcome for His sake, the more our lives testify to the truth of His worthiness.

In fact, the more we suffer for Him, the more intimately we come to know Him and be identified with Him. God's grace in this is unimaginable. We should certainly take heart in the midst of all our troubles.

Post 28:

In Philippians 1:12-17, Paul says, "Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ

out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."

Paul writes this from prison and he is speaking about his imprisonment. He is noting how many good things have resulted from his persecution. All the soldiers in the palace guard and indeed, everyone who heard of his imprisonment realized his mistreatment was for the sake of Christ. All the followers of Christ who heard of his suffering, were emboldened to speak out more confidently in sharing the gospel more widely and without fear, seeing how God was strengthening and using Paul from prison. Paul sees how God's Kingdom is being advanced both among believers and unbelievers alike, since God is making His name more famous even among those seeking to hurt Paul.

In other words, Paul recognizes that in Christ, we win no matter what the enemy tries to do to stop us. I spent years working closely with the major house church networks in China. They have a slogan that goes like this: "If you imprison me, you free me to share the gospel openly. If you put me in solitary confinement, you enable me to meditate on scripture and to pray. If you beat me, you allow me to glorify God. If you seize my home or farm, you are freeing me to travel widely to spread the gospel. If you kill me, you are sending me to glory." That slogan makes it clear that no matter what the enemy does, we win. Everything the powers of darkness do to try to stop us, only serves to advance the cause of the Kingdom.

Therefore, we can and should rejoice in our difficulties. Paul did. We can. God uses our troubles for our good and His glory.

Post 29:

Philippians 3:7-11 says, "But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in—Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead."

Paul sets an example for us here. He considers the loss of his reputation, his accomplishments, his learning, his possessions and his life to be a small price to pay for the opportunity to know Christ and to be "in Him," having His righteousness and His life.

Paul realizes that the path to intimacy with God and eternal life with God lies through suffering and even death. It is through suffering with and for the Lord that we come to

know Him. It is through suffering with and for the Lord that we are made like Him, and we are conformed to His likeness, His image. If we are to share His glory, it is only through sharing in His suffering and death.

When we come to this realization, we understand that sacrifices for the sake of the Lord and His Kingdom are not only natural and necessary, but welcome. Nothing will matter to us except loving and pleasing and serving the Lord.

Post 30:

In 2 Timothy 2:3-4, Paul tells Timothy, "Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer."

We expect soldiers to be ready to make all sorts of sacrifices in order to carry out their duties. They may have to sleep out in the open, forsake all the comforts of home, leave their friends and families, and live in constant danger, taking great risks in order that they might serve their nation. They focus not on their own comfort or convenience or pleasure, but rather the instructions of their commanding officer.

We are to serve in that same way as soldiers of the King, serving His will and seeking to advance His Kingdom. This means we are to be willing to suffer for Jesus' sake. This is not a cause for special praise. This is the natural by-product of our position, which we have willingly taken on.

In Luke 17:7-10, Jesus says, "Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Won't he rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

In the same way, suffering is part of the job description for citizen-soldiers of the Kingdom. Our appropriate response is to expect suffering willingly, and not to complain or whine about it. The difference between us and the soldier or the slave, is that we will be honored and rewarded and glorified for all eternity as God's children. The pay is a lot better for soldiers of the King!

Post 31:

In 2 Timothy 2:11-13 Paul says, "This saying is trustworthy: 'If we have died with him we shall also live with him; if we persevere we shall also reign with him. But if we deny him he

will deny us. If we are unfaithful he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.'"

It is evident from this passage that our response to tribulations is critical. We are to persevere. As in the parable of the soils in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8, "Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away." (Luke 8:13). Trials are a test to see whether or not our roots are in Christ.

If our roots are in Christ we will persevere. If He is our foundation, we will stand in the storms. In Matthew 7:24-27 Jesus said, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

If we do not persevere, but rather deny Him by word or deed, by action or inaction, He will deny us. In Luke 9:26, He says, "Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."

We are to be bold emissaries of the Kingdom. 2 Corinthians 5:20 says, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

The enemy has a purpose for persecution. His purpose is to silence us. If we allow persecution or the fear of persecution to silence our testimony, we are collaborating with the enemy. Let us rather, boldly and openly, stand for our King and His Kingdom in the midst of persecutions and threats.

Post 32:

There are a couple of passages in Hebrews that always astound me. One of them is in Hebrews 2:9-10: "But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered."

The part that surprises me is that it says Jesus was made perfect by what He suffered. Not that He was ever imperfect in any way, yet in some sense He could not be complete or all

that He was intended to be apart from suffering. If that was true for Jesus, how much more so will it be true for us, who are imperfect in many respects.

Not only that, but as we see in verse 9, His being crowned with glory and honor was directly tied to the fact that He suffered death. Our death is integrally tied with His, just as our glory is integrally tied with His. We must die to self to live to Christ. Suffering in the flesh is tied to victory in the spirit. This is something I find difficult. My flesh enjoys being coddled and spoiled. Just as the body is trained by putting it through the difficulties of intense exercise, so I need to embrace spiritual training which comes by denying the desires of my flesh for comfort and ease in order that I might pursue the advancement of the Kingdom of God.

Post 33:

The other passage in Hebrews that always surprises me is Hebrews 5:7-8 "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered."

Did I hear that right? Jesus learned obedience from what He suffered? Again, it was not that Jesus was ever disobedient, but in some way, His obedience could not be complete apart from enduring suffering. If that was true for Him, how much more necessary will suffering be for us, who have been disobedient. Surely suffering is also necessary for us to learn obedience. This is yet another valuable gift we derive from suffering.

The Lord has us all in training and preparation for reigning with Him for eternity. This requires us learning obedience. I learned long ago as a parent that you never know the level of obedience a child has until you ask them to do things they do not want to do. If a child is only asked to do things they want to do then their motive is in question. If they obey in something that goes against their desires then their obedience and submission is known. Thus, we can rejoice in the opportunity to demonstrate our love and submission to the Lord through suffering obediently.

Post 34:

Hebrews 10:32-39 says, "Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has

promised. For, 'In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay.' And, 'But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.' But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved."

This is a beautiful picture. These people chose to suffer public humiliation, confiscation of their property, imprisonment, and all sorts of persecution gladly, knowing that their reward was greater and eternal. Their confidence will prove well-founded. The promise to them is that if they persevere and do God's will, they will receive what God has promised. Those who shrink back, prove their commitment was empty, and are punished. Those who are faithful are saved with a great and eternal salvation.

We see the same portrait in Moses, described in Hebrews 11:24-26: "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

In China, one of the major house church networks has people who are being baptized take a pledge:

"I am ready at any time and any place to suffer for the Lord.
I am ready at any time and any place to be imprisoned for the Lord.
I am ready at any time and any place to escape for the Lord.
I am ready at any time and any place to die for the Lord."

They are then baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This makes it quite clear from the moment they identify with Him that they understand what it will cost to follow Him and they recognize He is worth it.

If new believers realize that suffering for Christ is normal and expected, then they are far less likely to be confused, or discouraged, or hopeless, or bitter, or angry, when they face that suffering. Suffering for Christ is the normal life of a believer. One measure of God's greatness is that He can strengthen us to endure it, and He can use it for our good and His glory.

Post 35:

Hebrews 11:17-19 tells us, "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death."

The entire chapter is full of examples like this. Of course, we know that at the last moment, God stopped Abraham, and provided a substitute sacrifice. Abraham didn't know that, however. He trusted that God was good, even though God's command seemed cruel and heartless and senseless. He was obeying God despite the fact that God's guidance seemed ridiculous. He assumed it was a test of His love for God, and he was correct.

Jesus said the greatest commandment was to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30) He also said, "If you love me, keep my commands." (John 14:15) Thus, our love is demonstrated by our obedience. If we love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, then we will obey Him no matter what the cost. It is no test for the Lord to ask things of us that cost us nothing. The test is in His instructions when obedience will result in pain and loss. He often tests us in these ways. Will we obey?

Post 36:

Hebrews 11:32-38 says, "And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground."

Hebrews 11 is called the "hall of faith." It is interesting that in this list of heroes of the faith, the common factor is not whether their story had a happy ending on earth or not. The common factor is that they all experienced severe trials. In some cases, as in the verses up to women receiving back their dead by resurrection, God miraculously delivered them for His glory. In the verses after that, for some reason, He chose not to deliver them, also for His glory.

You see, God's great power is demonstrated in the cases where He provided miraculous relief. His worthiness, however, is demonstrated in the cases where people were ready and willing to pay any price for His sake, and they do so. His true greatness is what explains their willing sacrifice.

One of the best ways, then, to show forth God's glory is for us to face extreme trials. He is glorified through that either way, as long as we remain faithful in the suffering. The other

wonderful news is that we then receive eternal reward and joy in His presence. It is truly a "can't lose" scenario.

Post 37:

In Hebrews 12:4-11, the author says, "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.' Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

Do you want God's holiness and righteousness? Do you want His peace? Do you want to be strengthened and trained? If so, then you want God's discipline. These are all benefits of God's discipline. When He gives painful discipline, it is evident that we are His children.

Our response is to be that we submit to the discipline, that we respect our Father in heaven for providing it, and that we learn and grow from it. We are to endure it and be grateful for it. God is giving it to us for our own good. He is a good Father and is doing it for our blessing. In this case, the saying is true: "No pain, no gain."

Post 38:

James 1:2-5 says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces ⌜endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

We see here that the many kinds of difficulties we face have some common results. First, we need to recognize them as tests of our faith. These tests produce a variety of wonderful results. We gain endurance, which perfects us in many other ways, completing our character development. These difficulties then, are what the Lord uses to conform us to the image of Christ.

It is for this reason that James exhorts us to consider it all joy when we face these difficulties. God is developing His character in us, preparing us in every way to be with Him forever in glory. The trials are God's gift to us.

Post 39:

In James 5:10-11, James tells us: "Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy."

Job is an example of someone who suffered tremendously, losing everything he owned, his family, and his health, in a most tragic and severe fashion. Then, even his wife and closest friends turned against him despite his righteousness and positive response. In his case, however, the Lord provided comfort and relief during the years of his remaining life upon earth.

The older I get, the more I appreciate the character qualities of patience and perseverance. When I was young, I used to assume that patience and perseverance were a given. Now I respect the character and strength they represent. Patience and perseverance are the responses the Lord is looking for from us when we undergo suffering. These are the qualities He rewards with blessing, compassion, and mercy.

The good news is that each one of us is guaranteed this relief, blessing, compassion and mercy in full measure and forever. We may not see it in this lifetime, but we will definitely reap the rewards in eternity and for eternity.

Post 40:

Glory results from suffering. It will bring glory to God and to us when Jesus returns. In 1 Peter 1:6-7 it says, "In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

Our greatest purpose in life is to glorify God. Since suffering for Him accomplishes that, it is a valuable thing. It glorifies Him because it demonstrates the genuineness of our faith and His worthiness to suffer for. He is worth it.

As followers of Christ we rightly give significant attention to worship. Worship is anything that shows the worthiness of God. I value suffering for doing God's will as a tremendous

form of worship that will not be available to me in eternity. Therefore, I need to take the opportunity now while I have it.

Finally, we will share in that praise, glory, and honor on that day and for eternity. As Jim Elliot famously said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Post 41:

1 Peter 2:19-23 says, "For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously."

Twice in this passage we are told that we find favor with God if we suffer unjustly and we patiently endure it. If we do not patiently endure it, presumably there is no benefit. Peter points to Jesus as our example in this. He didn't complain or threaten or retaliate. Instead He entrusted Himself to God, knowing that in the end, the Father would make everything right.

Enduring unjust suffering, then, is an opportunity to demonstrate Christ-likeness and to please God. This is truly good news. This is yet another example of how short-term difficulty results in long-term blessing. This is the sort of situation that is indeed a cause for rejoicing.

Finally, note that this kind of suffering is essential for us to fulfill our calling. In fact, Peter tells us this is central to our calling, it was for this very purpose, that we would follow Christ's example in how to suffer well.

Post 42:

In 1 Peter 3:13-17, Peter asks, "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.' But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil."

In this passage, Peter says we are always to look for opportunities to share the message of the Kingdom, and to do so in a gentle and respectful manner. We are to constantly model irreproachably good behavior. We are to be fearless in the face of threats and attacks. He notes that sometimes it is God's will for us to suffer for doing what is right. When that happens, we are blessed.

I am reminded of David's behavior toward King Saul. David fearlessly persisted in his exemplary behavior in general and toward Saul in particular. Saul continued to pursue David, seeking to kill him, but in the end, David was blessed. The difficulties were used to test and to prepare David to be greatly blessed and used by the Lord.

Post 43:

In 1 Peter 4:1-2, Peter tells us, "Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God."

What Peter has in view here is our identification with Christ. He is our forerunner. He is our model. He denied His own desires, comfort, will, and safety, in order to obey God's purposes in all these areas. He did not live for sin but for the heavenly Father.

Sin is anything we think, do, say, or fail to do, think or say that is different from the Father's will. Jesus said what the Father told Him to say and nothing else. He did what the Father guided Him to do and nothing else. In so doing, He perfectly fulfilled the Father's will in and through His life. He reflected the Father.

All this was achieved through Jesus' suffering. We are called to suffer in the same way, denying ourselves, taking up our "cross" daily, and following Him and His example (Luke 9:23). Thus, in a sense, our sanctification, our being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:28-29), and our being guided into the good works that God prepared beforehand for us to walk in (Ephesians 2:10), are all accomplished through the means of suffering.

Post 44:

1 Peter 4:12-14 says, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."

We can see from this passage that it is through our sufferings that we can most closely identify with Him. God's presence with us and within us is somehow made more real and substantial when we suffer for Him and because of Him. This is a blessing and a cause for joy.

In some way, we experience Jesus' glory when we suffer for Him. Even more significantly, we will share His future glory when He returns. This is a cause for great rejoicing now and will be a cause for even greater joy when He returns. Peter tells us that this suffering is to be expected. It is normal. We should not be surprised at it. It will come and it will be severe if we are truly following Him. This is a test of our faith. How we respond to it matters. This is part of our seemingly upside-down Kingdom. Rejoice at these fiery ordeals!

Post 45:

1 Peter 5:8-10 tells us, "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."

In other words, God will renew us, strengthen us, and make us strong and persevering by means of the suffering. This is all in preparation for eternity. God is building capabilities and character in us that we will reap the benefits from forever. Specifically, suffering is meant to increase our endurance, character and hope. This relatively short period of suffering gives us eternal blessings.

In order for us to reap these benefits we need to stand firm and resist in faith, faith that God will sustain us and give us these blessings. We can also take heart in the knowledge of how the Lord is sustaining our brothers and sisters around the world by His grace in their sufferings. We can do this only if we are alert and serious. We must pay attention to the intentions of the enemy, resisting him at every turn.

In Revelation 2:10, Jesus says to the church in Smyrna through John, "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown."

This is another example of how the Lord uses the attacks of the enemy to accomplish His purposes. The church in Smyrna was allowed to suffer, including imprisonment and death.

God used it to test them. When they passed the test the Lord would reward them with a victor's crown to wear through all eternity in His presence.

As Psalm 30:5b says, "weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning." This is the encouragement and hope we have, no matter how bitter the trials and tribulations may become. God in His wisdom and mercy turns all of it to our good and His glory. What the enemy intends for evil, God uses for our good. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

Here is a summary of the desired responses we are to have to suffering:
(These are taken from the verses quoted in the blog series. Total: 103 actions from those verses alone.)

- ⇒ Think about God's perspective on it
- ⇒ Wait for the Lord and rely on Him for relief
- ⇒ Hope in the Lord and seek Him
- ⇒ Quietly submit to the Lord
- ⇒ Humbly respond to the Lord and to the human agents
- ⇒ Do not grumble or complain
- ⇒ Examine our lives
- ⇒ Worship the Lord
- ⇒ Call out to the Lord
- ⇒ Do not fear
- ⇒ Mourn
- ⇒ Commit our lives to a life of difficult service
- ⇒ Do not be distracted from Kingdom purposes
- ⇒ Seek to please the Lord in the midst of it
- ⇒ Act righteously, even when it will result in persecution
- ⇒ Rejoice greatly
- ⇒ Be glad
- ⇒ Do not resist evil people acting against you
- ⇒ Love your enemies
- ⇒ Pray for those who persecute you
- ⇒ Love God more than anyone, including family members
- ⇒ Count the Lord as more important than anything in life
- ⇒ Be willing to sacrifice everything for Christ
- ⇒ Deny your own will and desires and serve Christ's purposes daily
- ⇒ Do not be selfish or conceited
- ⇒ Humbly consider others as more important than yourself and serve their interests
- ⇒ Do not use your position to your advantage but rather to serve others
- ⇒ Humble yourself by being willing to suffer for others benefit

⇒ Be encouraged
⇒ Continue proclaiming the good news of Jesus publicly and privately
⇒ Continue teaching others about the Kingdom life publicly and privately
⇒ Promote the Kingdom wherever you go
⇒ Welcome instruction about the Kingdom even when it leads to suffering
⇒ Model service despite suffering for other believers
⇒ Imitate followers of Christ who suffer well for serving the Lord
⇒ Persevere, demonstrate faith, and endure
⇒ Be filled with the Spirit
⇒ View the trials as identification with Christ and for His sake
⇒ Continue to speak the truths of the Kingdom that you have believed
⇒ Do not lose heart
⇒ Fix your eyes on the unseen and eternal realities rather than your present situation
⇒ Do not cause others to stumble
⇒ Show great endurance through every kind of unpleasant circumstance and situation
⇒ Live out purity, understanding, patience and kindness
⇒ Demonstrate a Spirit-filled life of sincere love, truthful speech and godly power
⇒ Show forth righteous living in spiritual warfare in the face of any response
⇒ Be content with being considered false, being beaten, poor, sorrowful and dying
⇒ Work hard for the Kingdom
⇒ Be willing to face every kind of difficulty, danger, discomfort, and sorrow
⇒ Be concerned for others welfare
⇒ Boast in your weakness
⇒ Delight in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and difficulties
⇒ Glory in your sufferings
⇒ Share in Christ's sufferings
⇒ Consider yourself to be a sheep to be slaughtered and sacrificed
⇒ Be willing to lose your freedom
⇒ Count any and every earthly thing as a loss compared to knowing Christ
⇒ Participate in Jesus' suffering and death willingly
⇒ Intentionally suffer through self-discipline as a sacrifice of service
⇒ Seek to please the Lord
⇒ Consider your service and sacrifice as the "least you can do"
⇒ Die to self with Jesus
⇒ Persevere
⇒ Practice the Lord's commands
⇒ Serve as Christ's ambassador and represent His desires and ways to others
⇒ Fervently pray with cries and tears to the Lord for His relief
⇒ Reverently submit to God
⇒ Remember God's faithfulness in past suffering
⇒ Stand with others who are suffering and join them in it
⇒ Joyfully accept the confiscation of your property
⇒ Live by faith

⇒ Do not shrink back from serving or speaking for the Lord
⇒ Choose to be mistreated with God's people rather than hiding your citizenship to escape
⇒ Value the treasures of God more than the treasures of this world
⇒ Embrace any sacrifice the Lord calls on you to make
⇒ Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength
⇒ Keep God's commands
⇒ Welcome and choose every form of opposition and pain and discomfort for God's sake
⇒ Resist and struggle against sin, even to death
⇒ Do not make light of discipline
⇒ Do not lose heart
⇒ Endure hardship, knowing its benefits
⇒ Respect God and submit to Him
⇒ Consider it pure joy
⇒ Let endurance have its full result
⇒ Be patient and persevere
⇒ Bear up under unjust suffering
⇒ Patiently endure unjust suffering
⇒ Do not commit sin or deceive to escape it.
⇒ Do not lash out at those causing you pain
⇒ Do not threaten
⇒ Entrust yourself to God who will judge righteously
⇒ Do not fear threats or be frightened
⇒ Revere Christ as Lord
⇒ Be prepared to give a witness for your hope, with gentleness and respect
⇒ Arm yourself with the purpose to suffer as Christ did and with His attitude
⇒ Do not be surprised at fiery ordeals and tests, they are expected and normal
⇒ Rejoice at the opportunity to share in Jesus' sufferings
⇒ Be alert and of sober mind
⇒ Resist the devil, firm in your faith
⇒ Be aware that believers around the world are suffering for their faith
⇒ Do not be afraid of future suffering
⇒ Be faithful to the point of death

Here is a list of benefits of persecution and suffering if we respond well:
(These are taken from the verses quoted in the blog series. Total: 76 in those verses alone)

◊ Position us to bless others
◊ Test and refine and prove us and our faith
◊ Give us hope
◊ Show us God's love is unstoppable and He is good and is all we need

◊ Show us God is listening and is near
◊ Bless us
◊ Comfort us
◊ Equip us to comfort others
◊ Prepare us to inherit the Kingdom of heaven
◊ Increase our reward in heaven
◊ Discover our true and real life in the Lord
◊ Help us know Jesus more intimately
◊ Help us become more like Christ and identify with Him more fully
◊ Help us gain more of Jesus' character
◊ Demonstrate the permanency and power of God's love for us
◊ Save our lives
◊ Cause us to bear more fruit
◊ Teach us peace
◊ Teach us to hope in our future eternal comfort and blessing
◊ Demonstrate God's trust in us and honor of us
◊ Give us joy
◊ Announce God's message broadly
◊ Encourage others in their faith
◊ Show our love to our brothers and sisters in the faith
◊ Shows our worthiness for the Kingdom
◊ Makes room for God's justice
◊ Shows God's power in us
◊ Demonstrates God's life in us
◊ Foreshadows our future glorification (like Jesus' resurrection)
◊ Causes others to be drawn to the Lord
◊ Results in thanksgiving from others for our sacrificial ministry
◊ Renews us day by day through the Lord
◊ Earns eternal reward
◊ Proves our genuineness
◊ Validates our ministry
◊ Validates our words
◊ Makes our lives known
◊ Enriches the lives of others
◊ Shows where our true riches are, where our hearts are
◊ Keeps us humble
◊ Gives us perseverance, godly character, and hope
◊ Honors us
◊ Shows we are God's children and heirs of His glory
◊ Demonstrates our conquering lives in the Lord
◊ Advances the gospel
◊ Gives confidence to fellow-believers
◊ Demonstrates our faith in the Lord, which is our righteousness

◊ Shows us the power of Jesus' resurrection, and helps us share in it
◊ Provides access to Jesus' life and helps us reign with Him in eternity
◊ Gives us strength to stand
◊ Crowns us with glory and honor
◊ Perfects us
◊ Teaches us obedience
◊ Causes the Lord to be especially attentive to our prayers
◊ Enables us to experience better and lasting possessions
◊ Is a pathway to receive God's promises
◊ Is the way of salvation
◊ Shows the world is not worthy but the Lord is
◊ Is an opportunity for amazing victories that will glorify the Lord
◊ Is a way the Lord teaches us discipline
◊ Grows us in holiness
◊ Produces a harvest of righteousness and peace in our lives
◊ Produces endurance and perfects us and makes us complete in the Lord
◊ Enables God to demonstrate His compassion and mercy
◊ Proves the genuineness of our faith
◊ Results in praise, glory and honor to the Lord
◊ Helps us find favor with God
◊ Fulfills our calling
◊ Shames the enemies of the Kingdom
◊ Helps free us from sin's allure
◊ Causes us to live more fully for God's will and desires
◊ Increases our future joy
◊ Increases the glory of God in our lives and the fullness of the Holy Spirit
◊ Will result in our restoration, strengthening, firmness, and steadfastness
◊ Results in our receiving the victor's crown
◊ Achieves God's good purposes in our lives

KINGDOM LIVING

(The Commands of Christ)

a blog series by Curtis Sergeant

2016

276

Commands of Christ

1. Live by God's every word, not merely by food.
2. Do not put God to the test.
3. Worship and serve God alone.
4. Make my house a house of prayer for the nations and do not make it into a market or a den of thieves.
5. You must be born again.
6. Repent and believe the good news.
7. Go and learn what it means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."
8. Do not be amazed at My authority.
9. Rejoice when you are persecuted for My sake.
10. Let your good deeds bring glory to God.
11. Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or Prophets. I came to fulfill them.
12. Do not be angry with a brother.
13. Reconcile before you pray.
14. Lust is adultery. Radically protect yourself from it.
15. Do not divorce. Do not separate what God has joined together.
16. Do not swear.
17. Do not resist evil people who abuse you.
18. Give to the one who asks. Do not turn away from those who want to borrow. If someone takes what is yours, do not demand it back.
19. Love your enemies.
20. Take care not to do your righteous deeds in order to receive glory from men.
21. Pray like this…
22. Do not hoard treasures on earth, but in heaven.
23. Do not worry about your life or food or clothing but seek God's Kingdom and righteousness.
24. Do not judge.
25. Deal with your own sin before judging another.
26. Do to others as you would have them do to you.
27. Enter through the narrow gate.
28. Beware of false prophets.
29. Do not give what is holy to dogs or throw your pearls to swine.
30. Ask, seek and knock in prayer.
31. Be merciful and perfect as your heavenly Father is merciful and perfect.
32. Forgive and you will be forgiven.
33. Listen! (Usually in reference to one of His teachings or parables.)
34. Give and it will be given to you, abundantly.
35. Take care what you listen to and what you do with it.
36. Come to me. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.
37. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.
38. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, drive out demons.
39. Proclaim that the kingdom of God is near.
40. Freely you have received. Freely give.
41. Shake the dust off your feet where no one receives you or listens to you.
42. Go, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves, so be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves.
43. Do not worry about your defense when you are arrested for My sake.
44. Do not fear man, but fear God.
45. What I speak to you quietly, announce loudly.

46. Do not think that I came to establish peace on earth.
47. Look up and see the fields ripe for harvest.
48. Do not work for food that perishes, but for food that endures eternally.
49. Look out for the teaching and hypocrisy of the Pharisees.
50. Anyone who wishes to come after Me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.
51. Become like children.
52. Do not hinder anyone just because they are not in your group.
53. Resist temptation radically.
54. Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.
55. Deal with a brother who sins.
56. Forgive 70 times 7 times.
57. Do not judge by appearances, but judge justly.
58. Come to Me and drink.
59. Follow me and let the dead bury their own dead.
60. Do not rejoice at power over demons, but over eternal life.
61. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.
62. Be generous to the poor.
63. Beware of all greed.
64. Do not fear.
65. Sell your possessions and give to the poor.
66. Be ready and watching for My return.
67. Humble yourself.
68. Exalt the humble and serve them.
69. Use temporal wealth for eternal purposes.
70. When you have done all you were asked to, say, “we are unprofitable slaves, we have only done our duty.”
71. Remember Lot’s wife and do not try to preserve your life.
72. Be wholesome in your speech.
73. Let children come to Jesus and do not despise them.
74. Keep the commandments.
75. Serve others.
76. Have faith in God.
77. Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.
78. Beware of the scribes and do not imitate them.
79. Watch out that no false Christ deceives you.
80. When you see signs of my return, do not be terrified, but take heart.
81. Be alert for My return.
82. Follow and serve Me.
83. Love each other.
84. Take, eat, drink. Do this in remembrance of Me.
85. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God and in Me.
86. Believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.
87. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.
88. Remain in Me and in My love so you can keep My commands and vice versa.
89. Pray in My Name.
90. Take courage.
91. Receive the Holy Spirit.
92. Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel.
93. Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey all My commands.
94. Hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Kingdom Living

I am going to start a series of blog posts on the commands of Christ. This is an exceedingly important topic. In fact, the Great Commission describes the process of making disciples as baptizing people and ***teaching them to obey all Christ commanded***. There are a number of lists of the commands of Christ. I will add one more. This series of posts will primarily be based on my list.

Perhaps the most well-known list of the commands of Christ summarizes them in just seven commands. I feel there is value, however, in a more complete look at the topic. If we want the simplest list possible then we should probably just limit ourselves to the Great Commandment (and the Second) as Jesus did. If we love God with all our being and love our neighbor as ourselves then all the other commands will be fulfilled. In fact, Jesus equated loving Him with obeying Him. That is another way we can look at it.

Obedience to the commands of Christ has nothing to do with legalism or with somehow earning salvation. It is the response of our grateful heart in love to the One who loved us and gave Himself for us. It is done in the power of the Holy Spirit Whom He has given us. It is evidence of our new life in Him. It is the expression of our love for Him. As it says in **1 John 5:3**, "this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome." It is not an onerous duty but an overflow of loving gratitude.

Christ is our King. His desire is our aim. He has specific plans for what He wants to do in us in conforming us to His image. He has specific plans for what He wants to do through us as we are told in **Ephesians 2:10**: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." We want to please Him. We want His will to be done. That is what life in the Kingdom is all about. Kingdom living is about seeing His will done on earth as it is in heaven. That starts with obeying Jesus' commands.

Luke 10:25-28 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

Matthew 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Matthew 6:9-10 "This, then, is how you should pray: "'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven…"

Romans 8:28-30 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

John 14:15 "If you love me, keep my commands."

The Commands of Christ

Many people have compiled lists of the commands of Christ. There are actually a lot of "judgment calls" that are required to do so. You need to make some decisions about whether He was making a generalized command or a specifically limited command that was only applicable to the specific person in the specific situation. There are many places where He gives a command which is clearly aimed at a specific situation but there is evidence from other Scriptures that the command can and often does have broader application. There are also commands that were given multiple times in different contexts and one must determine whether to count that as a single command or multiple commands. One must also decide whether or not to include passages where Jesus is quoting the Old Testament.

With all that said, I have made my own list. It has 94 commands.

Why have so many people (including me) gone to the trouble to make such a list? I cannot speak for everyone, but I (and I suspect many others) have done it because of Matthew 28:19-20, the Great Commission. In that verse, Jesus commands His followers to make disciples. There are several participles in that verse in addition to the primary (imperative) verb. In one of those participial phrases, Jesus describes the act of making disciples as including "teaching them to obey all I have commanded you." In other words, every follower of Christ is to seek to get others to follow Jesus, and that includes getting them to obey all His commands. Since that is the case, it is pretty important that we have a clear idea of exactly what His commands are.

A German friend of mine, Wolfgang Simson, compiled his own list. He describes it as "the constitution of the Kingdom (of God)." I believe that is a helpful way to think of it. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is King. His commands are the constitution, the laws, the principles, the standards, the practices for living in that Kingdom. With that in mind, I am starting a series of blog posts which look at the commands of Christ. You may differ with me on the inclusion of some of the commands. That is fine, but don't lose the larger narrative that **our lives should be characterized by what Jesus commanded AND as His followers we should be getting others to love (and thus obey) Him as well. This is not optional or for extra credit. It is the very essence of what it means to be His follower.**

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20

Commands of Christ: 1

Live by God's every word, not merely by food.

Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Luke 4:4

He said in reply, "It is written: 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:4

This has many implications. For starters, it implies that God is speaking to us and that we need to be listening to Him. This requires intentionality on our parts. It implies that this listening needs to be a continual state and that our very lives depend on it. This is a deep subject, but rather than write voluminously on it, I will simply refer to some relevant Scriptures:

"Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God." John 8:47

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand." John 10:27-28

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you." John 16:13-14

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. Romans 8:14

We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. 1 John 2:3-6

Commands of Christ: 2

Do not put God to the test.

Jesus said to him in reply, “It also says, ‘You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.’” Luke 4:12

Jesus answered him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.’” Matthew 4:7

We are not to go off in pursuit of anything, including the Kingdom, and expect the Lord to bail us out. If He leads us into a risky situation, we are to enter it willing to sacrifice everything and risk anything. He may choose to deliver us for His glory. He may choose to let us suffer and sacrifice and die for His glory. Difficult situations are meant to be a test of us and not of God.

Commands of Christ: 3

Worship and serve God alone.

Jesus said to him in reply, “It is written: ‘You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.’” Luke 4:8

At this, Jesus said to him, “Get away, Satan! It is written: ‘The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.’” Matthew 4:10

Whom or what are you living for? How do you decide how to spend your life, time, energy, money, and other resources? What is your motive for life? Your purpose? If the answer is anything except God, then that is the wrong answer.

Commands of Christ: 4

Make my house a house of prayer for the nations and do not make it into a market or a den of thieves.

And he said to them, “It is written: ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a den of thieves.” Matthew 21:13

Then he taught them saying, “Is it not written: ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples’? But you have made it a den of thieves.” Mark 11:17

And to those who sold doves he said, “Take these out of here, and stop making my Father’s house a marketplace.” John 2:16

It is one thing to recover expenses when charging for goods and services related to the Kingdom, but there is a lot of profit made through the sale of “spiritual” products. I believe we should be VERY careful about this. All we have, all our knowledge and insight and experience and resources are from God. Freely you have received, freely give. (Matthew 10:8b) It is also a severe indictment that the VAST majority of the income of the Church is spent on herself in one way or another. That is in addition to a tremendous amount of graft.

Commands of Christ: 5

You must be born again.

Jesus answered and said to him, “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can a person once grown old be born again? Surely he cannot reenter his mother’s womb and be born again, can he?” Jesus answered, “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I told you, ‘You must be born from above.’ John 3:3-7

This is obviously not something that can be achieved by human effort. This is by the will and power of God. The Holy Spirit is the means and the evidence of this new birth. The life of the Kingdom cannot be lived through the flesh. The indwelling and filling of the Holy Spirit is the gift that keeps on giving. We must enter the Kingdom by Him and live the Kingdom life by Him. The fruit of the Spirit and one or more gifts of the Spirit will be evidence of it.

Commands of Christ: 6

Repent and believe the good news.

From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Matthew 4:17

“This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” Mark 1:15

The Kingdom of God has come to earth through Jesus. His work in restoring creation is now in process. He has begun the process of seeing His work done again on earth as it is in heaven. He commands us to voluntarily change our minds and our lives to allegiance to Him and alignment with His reign. This is good news. He will right all wrongs. He will fix all that is broken. He gives us the opportunity to join Him in ruling the renewed world forever. Our only alternative is to continue in our brokenness and, in the end, be forced to acknowledge His rule and face punishment as His enemies.

Commands of Christ: 7

Go and learn what it means, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.”

“Go and learn the meaning of the words, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.” Matthew 9:13

Jesus said this in explanation to why He was spending time ministering to the despised tax collectors rather than “good” people. Those who recognize they are not good and cannot be good and respond to Jesus’ offer to make them good are why He came. He doesn’t want people to cover their brokenness with religious activity without affecting the heart. Instead, he wants them to be changed by His grace and then to offer that same grace to others. He wants humble hearts which in gratitude show mercy to others in the same way they were shown mercy.

Commands of Christ: 8

Do not be amazed at My authority.

Truly, truly, I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to his Son the possession of life in himself. And he gave him power to exercise judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, because the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation. John 5:24-29

Jesus had been explaining that the healings He was performing and, indeed, all His activities were sanctioned and even commanded by God the Father. The Father had given Jesus all authority, including the authority to judge all people who ever lived. He had authority to condemn and punish and authority to justify and reward. He had authority to give life, not just temporarily but eternally. Therefore, we must not be surprised at anything He does. God has given Him all authority.

Commands of Christ: 9

Rejoice when you are persecuted for My sake.

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:11-12

Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way. Luke 6:22-23

In a broken world, up is down. In the present world, still awaiting full restoration and redemption, aligning ourselves with the righteous and good King of all creation will result in being hated and mistreated. This is actually a good sign. We need to rejoice in such treatment for His sake. It will result in eternal reward that far outweighs our temporary suffering. It demonstrates we are on the right side.

Commands of Christ: 10

Let your good deeds bring glory to God.

Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father. Matthew 5:16

As children of the good God, we must display His character and be good as well. This will result in good deeds. These must be done in such a way as to glorify our heavenly Father and not to bring attention to ourselves. He is the source of our goodness and must be acknowledged as such.

Commands of Christ: 11

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or Prophets. I came to fulfill them.

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven. I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:17-20

God's revelation of Himself and His will in the Old Testament was not abrogated by Jesus. Instead it was amplified, and clarified, and made possible by Jesus. Just knowing about these things is not enough. They must consume us. We can now have intimacy with God and know Him from within and hear Him constantly through His Spirit. We can not just know about His ways but actually live in them through the power of His Spirit.

Commands of Christ: 12

Do not be angry with a brother.

"You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, 'Raqa,' will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna. Matthew 5:21-22

This is one of those passages that brings to mind the famous Mark Twain quote: "It's not the parts of the Bible that I don't understand that bother me. It's the parts I do understand." It is very clear. As James puts it in James 1:19-20: "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires."

Commands of Christ: 13

Reconcile before you pray.

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court with him. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny. Matthew 5:23-26

It can be easy to forget that our relationship with God has a lot to do with our relationship with others. In fact, it is difficult to separate the two. As John says in 1 John 2:9-11: "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them." Let us do all we can to live at peace with others so our prayers may be unhindered.

As Paul says in Romans 12:17-19: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord."

Commands of Christ: 14

Lust is adultery. Radically protect yourself from it.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna. Matthew 5:27-30

In our day pornography has become an epidemic. There may have never been a time when this command has been more ignored. If we are followers of Christ then we need to look at people as Christ did. As Paul says in 1 Timothy 5:1-2: "Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity."

Commands of Christ: 15

Do not divorce. Do not separate what God has joined together.

"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce.' But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Matthew 5:31-32

Some Pharisees approached him, and tested him, saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?" He said in reply, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate." They said to him, "Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss her?" He said to them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. I say to you, whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery." Matthew 19:3-9

But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate." In the house the disciples again questioned him about this. He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." Mark 10:6-12

Marriage is not an agreement of convenience. It is a solemn vow before God. Divorce is rampant in society today. It is either because we do not understand marriage or because we do not respect God or both. His intention and command are clear. If there is a divorce then the parties should remain unmarried until the spouse dies.

Commands of Christ: 16

Do not swear.

"Again you have heard that it was said to your ancestors, 'Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow.' But I say to you, do not swear at all; not by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything more is from the evil one. Matthew 5:33-37

We need more people who are like those described in Psalm 15:4b, “who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and does not change their mind”. Unfortunately, it seems there are few people who are that trustworthy. Worse, it tends to be the least reliable people who are most likely to announce their steadfastness. Jesus says not to be like that. Let your word be enough and make sure it is, whatever the cost.

Commands of Christ: 17

Do not resist evil people who abuse you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. Matthew 5:38-41

This is one of the commands I struggle the most with. It just seems wrong. That is evidence that the Lord still has work to do on conforming me to the image of Christ. It’s a good thing Jesus demonstrated this for us or else He wouldn’t have died on the cross.

Commands of Christ: 18

Give to the one who asks. Do not turn away from those who want to borrow. If someone takes what is yours, do not demand it back.

Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow. Matthew 5:42

Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours, do not demand it back. Luke 6:30

But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Luke 6:35

This command is somewhat difficult with friends. With enemies? He must be kidding! This is another one of those commands we should be extremely grateful that Christ modeled for us. In Romans 5:7-8 we read: “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” In light of that, surely we can part with physical

goods to demonstrate we are His children and give a bit of the love He has lavished on us.

Commands of Christ: 19

Love your enemies.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:43-48

"But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Luke 6:27-29

For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, and get back the same amount. But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Luke 6:32-35

Wow. That pretty much redefines who an enemy is. It is not someone you hate, because there are no such people if you are truly a Christ-follower. It is someone who hates you. You are loving to everyone equally, just as the Lord is. This reminds me of a quote from Amy Carmichael. (I don't hate it because it isn't true. I hate it because it is true and it's convicting.) "No matter how suddenly you jar a bowl of sweet water, no bitter water will ever spill out."

Commands of Christ: 20

Take care not to do your righteous deeds in order to receive glory from men.

"But take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When

you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to others to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you." Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

The Lord wants us to do righteous deeds, but he is equally concerned that we do them with the right motive. The right motive is that the glory and honor go to Him. Giving to others, prayer, and fasting are all wonderful things, but only if they are done to please and glorify God and not to benefit us or build up our own reputation. The same thing can be said for all sorts of "good deeds" and ministry. In the very next chapter, Jesus makes it clear that there will be plenty of people prophesying and casting out demons and doing miracles in His name whom He does not know or recognize. The heart is deceitful and wicked. We would do well to watch our motives in all we do, including all we are purportedly doing for the Lord.

Commands of Christ: 21

Pray like this…

"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. "This is how you are to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread; and forgive us our

debts, as we forgive our debtors; and do not subject us to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Matthew 6:5-13

He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread and forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us, and do not subject us to temptation.” Luke 11:2-4

Jesus commanded us to pray. Not any or every prayer will do. There are ways we can pray that will not please Him. We are to pray with right motives. We are to pray thoughtfully. We are to pray in ways that acknowledge God’s holiness and fatherhood, and in submission to His will and ways. We are to pray for our needs and forgiveness and protection. Jesus taught elsewhere about prayer as well. Of course Jesus also modeled prayer. Perhaps the most complete understanding of prayer is that it is our communication with God, both speaking and listening. It is something we should be engaged in as a way of life, constantly aware of His presence and alert for His desires and will and purposes in every situation.

Commands of Christ: 22

Do not hoard treasures on earth, but in heaven.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be. The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light; but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be in darkness. And if the light in you is darkness, how great will the darkness be. No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. Matthew 6:19-24

Sell your belongings and give alms. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be. Luke 12:33-34

This command has two parts. First, we are not to hoard treasures on earth. This is not what we are taught in the world. We are taught that for our own security and comfort we must save up however much we will need in order to ensure we can maintain ourselves comfortably until our death. The second part of the command is that we are to hoard treasures in heaven. Part of how this is to be done is through giving to others here on earth. Motive and priority have a lot to

do with this. Are we living for God or for ourselves? Are we living for this life or eternity? Do we value earthly treasures or heavenly treasures? Jesus says it is impossible to "sit on the fence" in regard to this matter. We cannot serve both God and wealth.

Commands of Christ: 23

Do not worry about your life or food or clothing but seek God's Kingdom and righteousness.

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your lifespan? Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? So do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?' All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil." Matthew 6:25-34

He said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life and what you will eat, or about your body and what you will wear. For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Notice the ravens: they do not sow or reap; they have neither storehouse nor barn, yet God feeds them. How much more important are you than birds! Can any of you by worrying add a moment to your lifespan? If even the smallest things are beyond your control, why are you anxious about the rest? Notice how the flowers grow. They do not toil or spin. But I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass in the field that grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? As for you, do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not worry anymore. All the nations of the world seek for these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these other things will be given you besides. " Luke 12:22-31

This is another two-part command. First, we are not to worry about our temporal needs. God's character and nature preclude this. If we understand Who He Is, we cannot and will not worry about these things. If we do worry about them, it

reveals we do not know Him as we should. Even the natural world reveals His faithfulness and power. The second part of the command is that we are to seek His Kingdom and righteousness. The fact that we need not pursue our temporal needs is not to result in our indolence and passivity. On the contrary, the knowledge of the Lord and His care for us is intended to free us to focus all our being and efforts and resources on pursuing His will on earth. Our priority as citizens of the eternal Kingdom is to serve the purposes and desires of the King.

Commands of Christ: 24

Do not judge.

"Stop judging, that you may not be judged. For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you." Matthew 7:1-2

"Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven." Luke 6:37

Even Jesus, in His earthly life, did not come to judge. ("I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day." John 12:46-48). Our task is not to judge. Our task is to obey the Lord and share His words with others. We are not responsible for what others do with that message but we are responsible to share it. This is our role as citizens of the Kingdom of God…not as judge, but as messenger or representative. If we misunderstand our role then we also misunderstand our relationship with God. We demonstrate the reality of our forgiveness when we forgive.

Commands of Christ: 25

Deal with your own sin before judging another.

Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove that splinter from your eye,' while the wooden beam is in your eye? You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye. Matthew 7:3-5

Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove that splinter in your eye,' when you do not even notice the wooden beam in your own eye? You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye. Luke 6:41-42

This can be a challenge for me. I have a habit, at least in my mind, of comparing my strong points with the weak points of others. I want to value and prioritize my strengths and ignore my weaknesses, while doing exactly the converse with others. It might prove to be motivating to bear in mind that the Lord will judge us in the same way we judge others. I need to show grace to others both for their sake and for my own.

Commands of Christ: 26

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

"Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets. Matthew 7:12

Do to others as you would have them do to you. Luke 6:31

This is actually one of the most quoted commands of Christ. I often hear it applied as an issue of commission of negative actions rather than omission of positive actions. In other words, I will hear a parent say, "Johnny, you shouldn't hit people. Would you like it if they hit you?" It is perhaps even more challenging if we think of it in positive terms, such as "You should write a note of encouragement to Sue. Wouldn't you like it if someone wrote you a note of encouragement?" Living a life that is pleasing to God is much more than simply avoiding doing bad things. The life of service and love to which we have been called is one of constantly demonstrating love to those we encounter. All of us like to be treated in that way.

Commands of Christ: 27

Enter through the narrow gate.

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few." Matthew 7:13-14

Someone asked him, “Lord, will only a few people be saved?” He answered them, “Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough. After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking and saying, ‘Lord, open the door for us.’ He will say to you in reply, ‘I do not know where you are from.’ And you will say, ‘We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.’ Then he will say to you, ‘I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!’ And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out. And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God. For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.” Luke 13:23-30

There are not many roads to salvation. Only one. Jesus. There are not lots of ways to please Him. He is pretty specific that only those who love Him will be loved by the Father. All those who love Him will obey Him. The Holy Spirit is given to those who obey Him. I didn’t say those things, He did. He wasn’t talking about earning salvation. He was talking about the evidence that would be demonstrated by those whom were saved. Our righteousness is only in Him and through the life of the Spirit whom He gave us. We are still to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Resting in the Lord does not preclude laboring for His Kingdom. It is hard work. It is impossible work, but He does it for us, through us.

Commands of Christ: 28

Beware of false prophets.

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. So by their fruits you will know them. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?’ Then I will declare to them solemnly, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.’” Matthew 7:15-23

This is one reason Scripture tells us to examine ourselves to see if we are indeed “in the faith.” Many people, not a few, are deluded in thinking they are members

of God's family. We need to examine ourselves and others with whom we interact, especially those who teach or minister in the church. We must not be deluded or led astray by such people. The evidence will be in their lives (and in our lives). They will be doing God's will. We are not doing them or ourselves any favors by ignoring the evidence. If people are not in the Kingdom of God, they need to know it.

Commands of Christ: 29

Do not give what is holy to dogs or throw your pearls to swine.

"Do not give what is holy to dogs, or throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot, and turn and tear you to pieces." Matthew 7:6

This is reminiscent of several verses in the book of Proverbs, including the one about not arguing with a fool. It is not good stewardship of our time, energy, or influence. This leads to the converse principle of focusing our efforts on those who are faithful. This is not only for the sake of the faithful but also for the sake of the unfaithful. Scripture clearly teaches that those who are given much have more expected of them. Hence, we are only increasing judgement on those who are not faithful when we give them truth or guidance.

Commands of Christ: 30

Ask, seek and knock in prayer.

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf of bread, or a snake when he asks for a fish? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him." Matthew 7:7-11

"And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the holy Spirit to those who ask him?" Luke 11:9-13

This is a clear directive to pray persistently, including praying for the filling of the Holy Spirit. Parents enjoy interacting with their children. Parents like it when their provision for their children is not taken for granted, but rather appreciated and acknowledged. God feels the same way. He wants us to continually seek Him.

Commands of Christ: 31

Be merciful and perfect as your heavenly Father is merciful and perfect.

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Luke 6:36

So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:48

I am not particularly fond of any passage that talks about how I am to do or be anything at the same standard that God does or is. Those commands make it quite clear that they are impossible to obey. That is the point. In our own ability, these commands are impossible to follow. These can only be obeyed as we are walking in the power of the Holy Spirit. They can only be followed if Jesus resurrected life is being demonstrated in our (spiritually) crucified bodies. We must not be satisfied with being better than we were yesterday. Anything short of God's perfect standard needs to result in a holy dissatisfaction. We are to be merciful to the same extent God is. We need to be perfect as God is.

Commands of Christ: 32

Forgive and you will be forgiven.

"Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven." Luke 6:37

"If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions." Matthew 6:14-15

Jesus knew a thing or two about motivation. I believe He was pretty serious about us paying attention to this command. I am likely to pay attention if a command is directly linked to how I will be treated, especially if it involves my eternal destiny. This is pretty clear. Jesus was not saying we earn our salvation by forgiving others. He was saying that our attitude toward others is an evidence of the attitude that is required to receive forgiveness: humility. If we truly recognize our unworthiness before Him then when we receive His mercy and

grace, we will be grateful. We will also recognize that others deserve mercy and grace just as much as we did, and seek to see that they get it.

Commands of Christ: 33

Listen! (Usually in reference to one of His teachings or parables.)

"Whoever has ears ought to hear." Matthew 11:15 (about John the Baptist)

"Whoever has ears ought to hear." Matthew 13:9 (about the parable of the sower)

"Hear then the parable of the sower." Matthew 13:18 (about the parable of the sower)

"Whoever has ears ought to hear." Matthew 13:43b (about the parable of the weeds)

He summoned the crowd and said to them, "Hear and understand." Matthew 15:10 (about teaching on purity)

"Hear another parable." Matthew 21:33 (about the parable of the tenants)

"Hear this!" Mark 4:3 (about the parable of the sower)

He added, "Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear." Mark 4:9 (about the parable of the sower)

"Anyone who has ears to hear ought to hear." Mark 4:23 (about the parable of the lamp)

He summoned the crowd again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand." Mark 7:14 (about teaching on purity)

"Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear." Luke 8:8b (about the parable of the sower)

"Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear." Luke 14:35b (about the cost of discipleship)

If you are a parent or if you have a parent, you are familiar with the pattern of a parent making sure they have the attention of the child before saying something especially important or urgent. It also helps if the parent makes sure they have eye contact with the child when they do so. This is the function of Jesus' habit of

asking his listeners to pay particular attention as he does in the passages above. For example, the fact that the parable of the sower occurs in all four gospels and in all four the author notes that Jesus called special attention to the parable leads me to think it is especially critical to hear and understand it. Evidently, it is quite important for us to be committed to being good soil and to look for good soil. I would suggest looking carefully at the passages referenced above and then ordering your life accordingly.

Commands of Christ: 34

Give and it will be given to you, abundantly.

Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you." Luke 6:38

Clearly, this often doesn't happen until our eternal reward. That actually makes it just that much greater of a promise. This is one of those commands that has a large "carrot" attached. Who wouldn't want to be treated with grace and mercy and generosity? The fact that when we give temporal gifts or benefits we can reap eternal rewards, demonstrates God's character in a marvelous way and gives us a model for how we should treat others.

Commands of Christ: 35

Take care what you listen to and what you do with it.

He also told them, "Take care what you hear. The measure with which you measure will be measured out to you, and still more will be given to you. To the one who has, more will be given; from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." Mark 4:24-25

"Take care, then, how you hear. To anyone who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he seems to have will be taken away." Luke 8:18

We are evaluated based on what we know. We are accountable to apply what we know and to share it with others. Failure to do so is a serious matter. From those to whom much has been given, much shall be required. (Luke 12:48) This is a valid principle in responsibilities and rewards, such as in the parable of the talents. It is also valid in terms of punishment. (Luke 12:48)

Our own faithfulness is important. It is also good stewardship for us to invest in others who are faithful with what they learn and receive. We are not doing people a favor if we continually "pour into them" if they are not faithfully applying and sharing what they have already learned.

Commands of Christ: 36

Come to me. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light." Matthew 11:28-30

This is one of the most encouraging commands I have ever heard. Though He is the King of kings, He is not a harsh taskmaster. He is gentle and giving and understanding of our weakness and is there to help. This is contingent on our taking *His* burden, and not our own. It is contingent on our following *His* instruction and *His* way and not our own. Of course, this is best in every conceivable way. He is wiser. He sees the end from the beginning. He made us and knows us better than we know ourselves. He wants the best for us and has the power to make everything work for our good. What a joy to obey this command to come to Him!

Commands of Christ: 37

Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest." Matthew 9:37-38

He said to them, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest." Luke 10:2

Many of you will have heard of the 10:02 prayer. It is based on Luke 10:2b. It was started back in the 1990's by a couple of friends of mine in Colorado, Kenny Moore and John White. They were prayer partners and started praying every day at 10:02 for laborers for the harvest wherever they happened to be. Now, due to their faithfulness (and the faithfulness of those they influenced), many thousands of people around the world pray that prayer daily. Many of us set our watch or phone alarms to remind us. It is remarkable how often we see answers to that prayer. This is a wonderful example of how applying what the Lord

teaches us and passing it on to others can change the world. Set your alarm and share this idea with others you encounter. The alarm going off is a great reminder to share the concept with others in your presence.

Commands of Christ: 38

Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, drive out demons.

"Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons." Matthew 10:8a

"Whatever town you enter and they welcome you, eat what is set before you, cure the sick in it." Luke 10:8-9a

These commands were to specific groups of people at specific times, but seem to be somewhat typical of what Jesus' followers continued to do in later years. His instructions to the seventy in Matthew and to the twelve in Luke provide at least general patterns for us today as we go to new areas to announce the Kingdom of God. These dramatic signs serve to demonstrate the activity of God among men. They show the concern of God for the plight of men and the power of God to do something about it. We are still to demonstrate these truths as we extend the Kingdom of God to every place and people group on earth where He is not known.

Commands of Christ: 39

Proclaim that the kingdom of God is near.

As you go, make this proclamation: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Matthew 10:7

Say to them, 'The kingdom of God is at hand for you.' Luke 10:9b

This is another of the commands Jesus gave as He was instructing the seventy and the twelve in these two passages. In many ways, this is the central command for Jesus' followers in terms of our task here on earth prior to His return. God's rule, God's reign, is the good news we are to share everywhere with everyone. His instruction is for our guidance. His purpose is our direction. His character is our aspiration. His desire is our command. His nature is our inspiration. His promise is our hope.

Commands of Christ: 40

Freely you have received. Freely give.

Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give. Matthew 10:8b

We didn't earn or pay for God's marvelous grace to us. We are not to charge others or ask them to earn it as we share it with them. Our service is to be a sacrifice of love in gratitude for all God's goodness and His incomprehensible greatness. When Jesus on two occasions cast out those who were doing business in the temple, He was illustrating this. In the Reformation, the opposition to the selling of indulgences was another. Today there is a huge industry built on profiting from the sale of Christian knick-knacks, books, movies, and so on. I believe a good deal of that is no better than those selling in the temple. When it comes to spiritual blessings and insights, what do we have that we were not given? Certainly, there are costs involved in distributing hard copies of books, but it is free to distribute them electronically. Great fortunes are being built from the sale of these items. One major result is that there are many spiritual resources that are only available to those who can pay for them. This distribution issue is one reason why there is such a strong correlation between places that have the least access to the gospel and those who have the greatest material poverty.

Commands of Christ: 41

Shake the dust off your feet where no one receives you or listens to you.

Whoever will not receive you or listen to your words—go outside that house or town and shake the dust from your feet. Truly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. Matthew 10:14-15

And as for those who do not welcome you, when you leave that town, shake the dust from your feet in testimony against them. Luke 9:5

Whatever town you enter and they do not receive you, go out into the streets and say, 'The dust of your town that clings to our feet, even that we shake off against you.' Yet know this: the kingdom of God is at hand. I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom on that day than for that town. Luke 10:10-12

Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them. Mark 6:11

This seems harsh. This is part of the basis of the old adage that we are only responsible for sharing the good news, not for people's response to it. This can be the merciful thing to do, however, because the more revelation and opportunity a person has, the more severely they will be judged if they do not respond. This also increases the opportunity for those who will respond to hear the message since the message-bearers will not be absorbed with the unresponsive for long periods of time. Also, those who fail to respond now may well become more responsive later, and some of the people who do respond now may be the ones to take the message to them at that time.

Commands of Christ: 42

Go, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves, so be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves.

"Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves. But beware of people, for they will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues, and you will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans." Matthew 10:16-18

"Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves." Luke 10:3

Welcome to the upside-down Kingdom. This is the Kingdom where the King sacrifices Himself for His subjects rather than the other way around. This is the Kingdom where the path to life is through dying to yourself. This is the Kingdom where the "soldiers" go out to be like lambs among wolves. As ambassadors for the Kingdom, we are to be wise, but for the purpose of blessing others rather than for protecting ourselves and our own welfare. We will be punished for being blameless and selfless and good. Despite this, we are to carry the King's message and deliver it to everyone, including those who will even kill us. The King is worth it. The life He gives is worth it. Our eternal hope of the Kingdom prevailing in the end, forever, is worth it.

Commands of Christ: 43

Do not worry about your defense when you are arrested for My sake.

"When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." Matthew 10:19-20

“When they take you before synagogues and before rulers and authorities, do not worry about how or what your defense will be or about what you are to say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that moment what you should say.” Luke 12:11-12

“They will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name. It will lead to your giving testimony. Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute.” Luke 21:12b-15

It is interesting that Jesus assumed His followers would be arrested and persecuted by authorities. It is also interesting that He specifically instructed them not to plan or prepare ahead of time for making a defense. He knew that His followers would have the Holy Spirit within them. He would speak to them moment by moment instructing them. This must have seemed strange to the ears of the disciples, since the Holy Spirit had not yet been given. This is a great comfort to us, however. Because of Jesus’ promise that He would give us irrefutable wisdom, we do not have to concern ourselves with the need to be the smartest person in the room. We simply need to listen and obey.

There are few testimonies more moving than those of disciples who have had opportunities like Jesus described. In 2 Timothy 3:12 Paul tells us that everyone who desires to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. While persecution takes different forms in different societies, this continues to hold true today. May each of us be living lives filled by the Holy Spirit and sensitive to His leadership so we will be ready every time such opportunities arise for us.

Commands of Christ: 44

Do not fear man, but fear God.

“I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body but after that can do no more. I shall show you whom to fear. Be afraid of the one who after killing has the power to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, be afraid of that one.” Luke 12:4-5

“And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Matthew 10:28

People have a tendency to become absorbed by the things of this world. They desire things of this world. They fear things of this world. They are proud of things of this world. This is a grave mistake. This world is temporary. The Kingdom of God is eternal. The new heavens and new earth which will be fully

renewed under God's uncontested reign are of far more value and importance. Hence, Jesus commands to desire those eternal things, and here, not to fear temporal death or loss. As Jim Elliot so eloquently put it before being martyred, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Therefore we need to seek the Lord and His will. Live for His purposes and Kingdom. Fear no opposition or loss.

Commands of Christ: 45

What I speak to you quietly, announce loudly.

"What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops." Matthew 10:27

Jesus said this in the context of instructing His followers not to be afraid as He sent them out for ministry. He was telling them to be bold in their service of the Kingdom. He had just told them that they were being sent out as lambs in the midst of wolves. He had told them they would be beaten and arrested for identifying with Him. He said they would be betrayed even by family members.

He was about to tell them not to fear death. He was about to tell them they had to love him more than parents or siblings or children. He was about to tell them they had to be prepared to die for Him.

In this passage Jesus tells His followers that their public and bold acknowledgement of Him was tied to His public acknowledgement of them by Him before God the Father. It is interesting that in the book of Acts, the most frequently mentioned result of people being filled with the Holy Spirit is boldness. If we are ashamed of Him, He will be ashamed of us. Be bold in living for the Lord!

Commands of Christ: 46

Do not think that I came to establish peace on earth.

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come to bring not peace but the sword. For I have come to set a man 'against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's enemies will be those of his household.' Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and

follow after me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Matthew 10:34-39

"Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." Luke 12:51-53

Be assured, Jesus is offensive to anyone who wants to live for themselves. He brings division to any group that has any agenda other than His Kingdom and glory. If we view Jesus as some gentle soul who just wants everyone to get along, we misunderstand Him. He deeply desires peace and unity, but a peace and unity under God. Unity on His terms, under His direction, for His purposes. He has drawn a "line in the sand." Everyone is either for Him or against Him. We need to be very clear on that fact. If we claim we are His, that means our lives are His. Our relationships are His. Our possessions are His. He has all our allegiance and time and energy and resources.

Commands of Christ: 47

Look up and see the fields ripe for harvest.

"Do you not say, 'In four months the harvest will be here'? I tell you, look up and see the fields ripe for the harvest. The reaper is already receiving his payment and gathering crops for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together. For here the saying is verified that 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap what you have not worked for; others have done the work, and you are sharing the fruits of their work." John 4:35-38

Jesus is asking His followers to see things from God's perspective. In the way that man sees grain to be harvested and gathered into barns, God sees the souls of men to be brought into His Kingdom. That harvest has eternal consequences. God has been at work, preparing the harvest. Other servants of God have labored greatly in removing stones from the field, preparing the soil, sowing seed, providing tools, and so on. Where and when the harvest is ready, we must reap. We are responsible to watch for that readiness and take advantage of it so the harvest is not wasted, rotting in the field. We need to look up, away from our own personal concerns, to be alert for such opportunities.

Commands of Christ: 48

Do not work for food that perishes, but for food that endures eternally.

"Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal." John 6:27

This is very reminiscent of Deuteronomy 8:3, which Jesus quoted at His temptation in the wilderness after His baptism: "man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." This is in the context of Jesus calling Himself the Bread of Life and chastising people for following Him because He fed the multitudes rather than because they recognized who He was.

It seems that people are in the habit of confusing mere physical survival with the abundant life which God intends for us. The former is temporal. The latter is eternal. The former is a pale shadow of the glorious reality of the latter. Let us never be distracted from pursuing the abundant life the Lord promised by concern for meeting temporal needs. That is a mistake of infinite proportions.

Commands of Christ: 49

Look out for the teaching and hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

Jesus said to them, "Look out, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." They concluded among themselves, saying, "It is because we have brought no bread." When Jesus became aware of this he said, "You of little faith, why do you conclude among yourselves that it is because you have no bread? Do you not yet understand, and do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many wicker baskets you took up? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you took up? How do you not comprehend that I was not speaking to you about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that he was not telling them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Matthew 16:6-12

Meanwhile, so many people were crowding together that they were trampling one another underfoot. He began to speak, first to his disciples, "Beware of the leaven—that is, the hypocrisy—of the Pharisees." Luke 12:1

He enjoined them, "Watch out, guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." Mark 8:15

Jesus was telling His followers to be careful what they listened to. On another occasion (Matthew 23:1-11) He warned them that the real problem was not the content of their teaching but the conduct of their lives. In God's eyes, those are connected. Hypocrisy, to do one thing and say another, is a serious matter. The priorities of the Pharisees were out of order. They valued appearance above substance. They valued honor from men more highly than honor from God. This corrupted their lives and therefore their teachings.

We need to be careful to examine our motives and live for an audience of One. Our lives need to match our words. We need to guard our hearts from hypocrisy.

Commands of Christ: 50

Anyone who wishes to come after Me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it." Mark 8:34-35

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay everyone according to his conduct." Matthew 16:24-26

"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Matthew 10:37-39

"If any one comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:26-27

God's salvation is free, but it costs everything. We cannot receive His gift of life without emptying our hands of anything else that is in them. Giving Him our allegiance means having no competitors for our affections. He is (and must be) of far more importance to us than our lives, than any earthly relationship, than all

our possessions. We are bound to Him entirely, with no reservation. We will obey Him and follow Him no matter what the cost, no matter what the sacrifice or risk. This is not optional. These are the terms which the Lord clearly communicated. Our decision and resolve will be tested. By His power and grace He will enable us to obey and follow through the fire and through the flood, with the temptation to ease and comfort, when alone or in the midst of a crowd going another way, and every other circumstance.

Commands of Christ: 51

Become like children.

He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me." Matthew 18:3-5

Pride is one of the most insidious sins. Jesus' teaching here is in the context of His followers asking Him who (among men) was greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. Essentially, Jesus is saying the God is the greatest. It is nonsensical to ask who is greatest (among men) in the Kingdom. None is worthy. None has power in themselves. Only the humble can enter. Only those who recognize they are helpless can receive God's power. We should rejoice in our relationship with the Lord and glory only in Him. The most humbly grateful soul is the greatest in the Kingdom.

Commands of Christ: 52

Do not hinder anyone just because they are not in your group.

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us." Jesus replied, "Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us. Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, truly, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward." Mark 9:38-41

Then John said in reply, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow in our company." Jesus said to him, "Do not prevent him, for whoever is not against you is for you." Luke 9:49-50

This is reminiscent of what Paul says in Philippians 1:15-18: “It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. [16] The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. [17] The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. [18] But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.”

It seems that in our day there are a lot of self-proclaimed servants of Christ who draw the lines more and more tightly in identifying who are legitimate disciples. They make major distinctions based on minor issues, while ignoring major considerations such as love. Pride is rampant, based on comparing themselves with others. Jesus’ high priestly prayer in John 17 where He prayed for unity among His followers ignored.

Paul says in Romans 14:4, “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.”

There are lines that need to be drawn. Those lines are between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. There are only two camps. Those who are for the Lord and those who are not. I love the time when Joshua was getting ready to attack Jericho. In Joshua 5:13-14 it tells us, “Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” “Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?”

Whether people are for us or not is irrelevant. The question is, are they on the Lord’s side. Let’s not shoot His allies.

Commands of Christ: 53

Resist temptation radically.

“Woe to the world because of things that cause sin! Such things must come, but woe to the one through whom they come! If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the fiery hell.” Matthew 18:7-9

“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’” Mark 9:43-49

If we have come to terms with the necessity of dying to ourselves to enter the Kingdom then this command should not even “raise an eyebrow.” Cutting off a hand or foot or gouging out an eye from a dead person is not a painful process. Six times in the gospels Jesus said that whoever wanted to save his life in this world would lose it, but whoever loses their life for His sake will find it for life eternal.

Jesus’ command makes it quite clear that anything that separates us from God must be dealt with severely. It is literally a matter of life and death. Sin is not something to be flirted with. We cannot please ourselves and serve God. If we think we can then we have deceived ourselves and not truly chosen to follow God. In our own strength, we cannot do this, but if we have truly repented and believed in the Lord, then through the power of the Holy Spirit whom He has given us, we can follow. If we have not truly turned to follow God, we must do so, or we will be separated from Him for eternity in hell.

Commands of Christ: 54

Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.

“Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if salt becomes insipid, with what will you restore its flavor? Keep salt in yourselves and you will have peace with one another.” Mark 9:49-50

This is in the context of holiness and purification from sin. Everyone must be purified. None is righteous in themselves. For those who have been purified and made holy, it is a tragedy for them to be defiled. Jesus is commanding us to stay pure and to be at peace with one another within His family.

We will be know by our fruit. Are we peaceable? Are we living holy and pure lives? These are evidences of genuine followers of Christ. This is what He commands.

Commands of Christ: 55

Deal with a brother who sins.

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that 'every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Matthew 18:15-20

I think this is one of the most ignored commands of Jesus. So often it seems that within the church, we respond to sin in every way except this. We will ignore it. We will gossip about it. We will avoid contact with the one who has sinned.

The most loving thing to do for someone in the church who has sinned, is to follow Jesus' instructions. This is for their sake, the sake of the church, and for God's sake. Everyone stands to lose if it is ignored or dealt with improperly. It is a serious matter so we need to deal with it directly and decisively. If possible we should limit disclosure of it to others. The process is clear.

The attitude is important as well. In Galatians 6:1 Paul tells us, "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted."

The purpose of doing this, is the joy and fellowship and restoration of the person who has sinned. Let's love one another deeply enough to do this for one another.

Commands of Christ: 56

Forgive 70 times 7 times.

Then Peter approaching asked him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus answered, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times. Matthew 18:21-22

"Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he wrongs you seven times in one day and returns to you seven times saying, 'I am sorry,' you should forgive him." Luke 17:3-4

Jesus must have known this would be one of His commands that might be exceedingly difficult for us to obey. He gave us some extra commentary on this issue. In the Lord's Prayer, he teaches us to pray for the Lord to forgive us as we forgive others. He then makes sure we understand by adding, "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." (Matthew 6:14-15)

Jesus also told a parable about an unforgiving servant which puts the matter quite clearly. Anything we may be called upon to forgive in others pales in comparison with what God is willing to forgive in us. Because of His infinite holiness, the "smallest" sin is infinitely unacceptable. As recipients of His grace and mercy we are called upon to reflect that grace and mercy when others sin against us.

Realizing the magnitude of the forgiveness we have received from God is important because, "Whoever has been forgiven little loves little." (Luke 7:47b) The more we realize the magnitude of our sin against God, the more we love Him. The more we love Him, the more we will forgive others who sin against us.

Commands of Christ: 57

Do not judge by appearances, but judge justly.

"Stop judging by appearances, but judge justly." John 7:24

This command is given in the context of Jesus being rebuked by the religious leaders for healing a man on the Sabbath. Jesus responds by admonishing them to live by God's character, nature, purposes, ways, and desires rather than merely legalism. This is a contrast between living according to Law versus living by the Spirit.

"The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7b) When God told this to the prophet Samuel, there was a fairly dramatic illustration given. The current king of Israel, Saul, was outwardly impressive, but proved to be immature and unfaithful. When Samuel, according to God's instruction, was choosing a new king from among the seven sons of Jesse, he was inclined to select the most impressive one. God, however, saw deeper than that. God chose the

younger and less impressive David because of his heart, which was like God's heart.

Let us press on to know God more fully and intimately in order that we may understand his character, nature, purposes, ways and desires. Let us live according to the Spirit rather than according to the Law.

Commands of Christ: 58

Come to Me and drink.

On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and exclaimed, "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him.'" He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive. There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified. John 7:37-39

This is reminiscent of Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well in Samaria in John 4. In verse 10 Jesus told her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." This is the sort of command which it is an obvious and immediate joy to obey. We have thirst. In this fallen world, there is so much unfulfilled desire, so much difficulty, so much heartache. Jesus commands us to come to Him to find fulfillment. He is the answer to the questions. He is the provision for the need. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we receive the downpayment on eternal, redeemed, full life. Come to Jesus. Drink.

Commands of Christ: 59

Follow me and let the dead bury their own dead.

"Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead." Matthew 8:22b

And to another he said, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, let me go first and bury my father." But he answered him, "Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Luke 9:59-60

The word "disciple" essentially means "follower". To follow Jesus means not following anything else. He is the exclusive determinant of what we do, where, when, and how. Jesus expounds on this idea in Luke 14:25-35. In verse 26 of that chapter, He says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple." The point is that there is no comparison between

the level of commitment we have for anything or anyone and our commitment to Christ.

Our overwhelming and overriding focus is on living as citizens of the Kingdom of God. We are to follow our King at all times, in all places, without reservation or exception. That is what Jesus commands.

Commands of Christ: 60

Do not rejoice at power over demons, but over eternal life.

I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Luke 10:19-20

This command was in the context of debriefing ministry with the 72. When they returned from their ministry they were particularly impressed by the authority the Lord had given them over demons. Jesus was commenting here that they were missing the point. In the big picture, this authority was simply a nice side benefit. The big picture was their relationship to God and their place in His Kingdom. That was the news. That was the impressive fact. That was the point of their ministry, to bring others into an awareness of and participation in this relationship and identity.

Commands of Christ: 61

Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.

One of the scribes, when he came forward and heard them disputing and saw how well he had answered them, asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "The first is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Mark 12:28-31

There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" He said in reply, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and

your neighbor as yourself." He replied to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." Luke 10:25-28

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a scholar of the law, tested him by asking, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments." Matthew 22:34-40

According to Jesus, this command, know as the Great Commandment, summarizes God's revealed will in the Old Testament. That is an impressive statement. Jesus tells us in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:17-20, that following Scripture is a serious issue which His followers should pay close attention to. In its Old Testament context, this is the command which God's people were commanded to be in constant awareness of. They were to speak of this constantly in their conversations at home and outside. They were to put reminders on their clothing and their doorposts to continually make them aware of it. This was the defining characteristic of their lives in every activity at every time. It needs to be the same for us today.

Commands of Christ: 62

Be generous to the poor.

Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you. Luke 11:39-41

This command is reminiscent of the Law and the Prophets in the Old Testament. God continually shows concern for the poor, the needy, the disadvantaged, the disenfranchised. He commands His people to care for them. This is not to earn favor with God by our pious actions. It is to honor Him and demonstrate our love for Him and others, displaying His character and His nature in our daily conduct and generosity and concern.

Commands of Christ: 63

Beware of all greed.

Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” Luke 12:15

Jesus illustrated this command by telling the parable of the Rich Fool. Jesus made it clear that no matter how comfortable and pleasurable and easy you may be in this life, it will mean absolutely nothing if you are miserable and suffering for all eternity. He made it clear that being rich toward God is quite different than being rich in this world. In fact, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says we cannot serve both God and wealth. It is one or the other. They are mutually exclusive as a goal or a motivator. We will definitely be called upon many times to sacrifice our own comfort and pleasure in this life in order to serve the purposes of God.

Commands of Christ: 64

Do not fear.

Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. Luke 12:32

We have a faithful and gracious and omnipotent God who provides us eternal and abundant life. What is there to fear? Any suffering or deprivation or sorrow is temporary and transient. Redemption and fulfillment and joy are our eternal destiny. Therefore, Jesus commands us not to fear. We are to keep our eyes fixed on the Kingdom of God rather than on this world.

Commands of Christ: 65

Sell your possessions and give to the poor.

An official asked him this question, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother.’” And he replied, “All of these I have observed from my youth.” When Jesus heard this he said to him, “There is still one thing left for you: sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” But when he heard this he became quite sad, for he was very rich. Luke 18:18-23

Now someone approached him and said, “Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?” He answered him, “Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the

commandments." He asked him, "Which ones?" And Jesus replied, "'You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother'; and 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The young man said to him, "All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Matthew 19:16-22

Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.[34] For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Luke 12:33

I find it interesting that every time I have heard anyone teach on the Luke 18 or Matthew 19 passages above, they are quick to point out that the Lord is asking that particular individual to do this, and it isn't intended for others. The Luke 12 passage above, however, is a general teaching given to His disciples. It seems clear from that passage that Jesus is instructing us not to accumulate wealth but rather to be generous in giving our surplus to those in need. This command comes with a promise of wealth in heaven in all three passages. Our hearts are where our treasure is. To say it differently, what we treasure is what we value. If we value the principles and purposes of the Kingdom it will be reflected in how we use our lives and our resources.

Commands of Christ: 66

Be ready and watching for My return.

"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?" The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose the servant

says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers. The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." Luke 12:35-48

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 24:42-51

"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'" Mark 13:28-37

He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will

never pass away. Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man." Luke 21:29-36

This command of Jesus is both important and urgent. He calls for vigilance. He calls for faithfulness. He calls for consistency. He warns against selfishness, laziness, and distracting anxiety. We are to live in a state of service to our King. It is not that we can thereby earn our salvation, but it is evidence of whom we serve. There are evidently those who claim to serve the Lord, but their lives betray the fact that they are actually serving themselves. They will be cast out by the Lord when He returns. As His servants, we are to constantly be about carrying out His instructions and His desires so we will be ready for His return at all times.

Commands of Christ: 67

Humble yourself.

"When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not recline at table in the place of honor. A more distinguished guest than you may have been invited by him, and the host who invited both of you may approach you and say, 'Give your place to this man,' and then you would proceed with embarrassment to take the lowest place. Rather, when you are invited, go and take the lowest place so that when the host comes to you he may say, 'My friend, move up to a higher position.' Then you will enjoy the esteem of your companions at the table. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 14:8-11

With people, sometimes the proud are allowed to exalt themselves, but this never happens with God. In the end, everyone who exalts themselves will be humbled. Scripture repeatedly tells us that "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." There are numerous examples of that, psalms and proverbs about it, and Jesus' own teachings and illustrations such as His story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Pride is the complete anti-God state of mind. It is the primary sin of Satan. C.S. Lewis called it "the cardinal sin." It is insidious and deceptive.

The root of pride often comes from comparing ourselves with others. If we are going to compare ourselves with anything else, it needs to be with God Himself and His standards. That will lead us to humility and to dependence on God and worship of God and gratitude to Him.

Commands of Christ: 68

Exalt the humble and serve them.

Then he said to the host who invited him, “When you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors, in case they may invite you back and you have repayment. Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” Luke 14:12-14

Jesus isn’t saying we shouldn’t seek reward for our actions. He is saying we should seek reward in eternity rather than in the “here and now.” He is saying we should seek reward that is truly valuable because it endures rather than deceptive and temporal reward. It is a sign of maturity and wisdom to understand delayed gratification. God is concerned to exalt the humble and to serve and bless them. He asks us to do the same. He sacrificed His very life to serve others, including us. He sends us to do the same, to live a life of sacrificial service. He will reward His children who live in that way. Do not be deceived, there are degrees of reward in heaven. That is a clear teaching in Scripture and the subject of several of Jesus’ parables. Aspire to please God and hear Jesus say, “Well done, you good and faithful servant.”

Commands of Christ: 69

Use temporal wealth for eternal purposes.

I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. Luke 16:9

Jesus said this in the context of His telling of the parable of the shrewd manager. He followed it up with His statement that whoever is faithful in little will be faithful with much. He clarifies and illustrated that statement by saying,

“So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own? No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God’s sight.” Luke 16:11-15

Our use of wealth in this life is a test of our hearts and can be a tool to use for eternal purposes. Are we seeking God or wealth? Are we living and serving for the kingdom of this world or the Kingdom of God? Clearly God has a purpose for our use of money other than our own pleasure and comfort. Jesus tells us to use temporal wealth for eternal purposes.

Commands of Christ: 70

When you have done all you were asked to, say, "we are unprofitable slaves, we have only done our duty."

"Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Won't he rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'" Luke 17:7-10

I'd say this this is a bit counter-cultural and politically incorrect in our day. There are lots of biblical metaphors of our relationship with Christ: slaves, friends, bride, body, etc. I dare say that slave is the least popular. It's true Jesus told the twelve disciples they were no longer His servants, but now were His friends. Despite this we see later disciples, including the apostle Paul, refer to themselves as slaves of the Lord. In some of His parables, Jesus has a master telling his slaves at the end of their service, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Here, Jesus says that even if we do everything we've been asked to, that we have only done the minimum. Let us rather seek extravagant ways to demonstrate our love for Him for all that He is and our gratitude to Him for all He has done. He says that even in regard to our enemies, if they ask for our shirt we should give them our coat as well. If that is to be our attitude toward our enemies then how much more should we go beyond what has been asked of us to glorify our perfect and gracious Lord?

Commands of Christ: 71

Remember Lot's wife and do not try to preserve your life.

Remember Lot's wife! Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it. Luke 17:32-33

Here is yet another place where Jesus tells us to live for eternity and not for our temporal life here. If, like Lot's wife, we become enamored with the pursuit of earthly benefits, then we will lose sight of eternal ones, and our lives will be led astray. Our direction determines our destination. If our eyes remain fixed upon the Lord, He will guide us and bring us safely into His presence. If we are distracted by the things of the world and seek them, we will end up with sulphur and fire in the end as Sodom did, and miss out on eternal reward. It is impossible to serve both God and worldly wealth.

Commands of Christ: 72

Be wholesome in your speech.

"Either declare the tree good and its fruit is good, or declare the tree rotten and its fruit is rotten, for a tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you say good things when you are evil? For from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks. A good person brings forth good out of a store of goodness, but an evil person brings forth evil out of a store of evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will render an account for every careless word they speak. By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." Matthew 12:33-37

Words matter. Unplanned words reveal the heart. For good or for bad, our words will defend or condemn us on the day of judgment. Amy Carmichael, the great missionary to India had a quote that always impressed me. She said, "No matter how suddenly you jar a bowl of sweet water, no bitter water will ever spill out." True enough. Let us guard our hearts, ever walking in the Spirit, so our speech might be gracious and suitable for a Kingdom ambassador.

Commands of Christ: 73

Let children come to Jesus and do not despise them.

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked them, but Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Matthew 19:13-14

And people were bringing children to him that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not accept the

kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them. Mark 10:13-16

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them, and when the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. Jesus, however, called the children to himself and said, "Let the children come to me and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." Luke 18:15-17

At that time the disciples approached Jesus and said, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father." Matthew 18:1-6, 10

In the eyes of men, children are of little account. They are often viewed as inconveniences. In the United States, in the name of convenience, we have murdered about 310 million babies through abortion (including chemical abortions) since Roe v. Wade in 1973. Only China, with their one-child policy is worse in this regard.

We ignore children. As a culture we often seek to delegate as much of their care and nurture as possible, through childcare programs, schools, age-specific programs in churches, babysitting, sitting them in front of televisions or computer screens, etc. We consider children a nuisance to be avoided.

Jesus had a very different attitude toward children and He instructs us as His followers, to follow His example. He spent time with them. He paid attention to them. He valued them. They served as an example of His pattern of valuing the last, the least and the lost. In fact, He held them up as an example for us to emulate. Their humility and dependence are a shining example in our world of pride and independence.

Value children. Demonstrate it by loving and investing in them.

Commands of Christ: 74

Keep the commandments.

Now someone approached him and said, “Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?” He answered him, “Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” He asked him, “Which ones?” And Jesus replied, “‘You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother’; and ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Matthew 19:16-19

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother.’” Mark 10:17-19

An official asked him this question, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother.’” Luke 18:18-20

In Matthew 5:17-20 Jesus said,“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

In our day, many religious teachers are denying the validity of these commands in the name of “good theology.” It is true enough that we are not under law but under grace. It is true enough that we cannot and will not earn salvation by obeying these commands. But what so many fail to recognize is that if we recognize all that Christ has done for us, and if we walk in the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit Whom He gives us, our love and gratitude and Spirit-filled life will result in a life that surpasses these commands. We will not only obey them but we will go beyond them. Obeying them out of love and gratitude is the least we can do. Keep the commandments. Teach the commandments. Do it from a Spirit-filled life of love and gratitude.

Commands of Christ: 75

Serve others.

But Jesus summoned them and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:25-28

Jesus summoned them and said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:42-45

He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are addressed as ‘Benefactors’; but among you it shall not be so. Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. For who is greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one seated at table? I am among you as the one who serves. Luke 22:25-27

So when he had washed their feet and put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, “Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do. Truly, truly, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it. John 13:12-17

God’s Kingdom is upside-down from the world. What king sacrifices himself for his subjects? What great man serves those under his authority? In a world that says, “Do as I say, not as I do.” We are told in Philippians 2:5-11, “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should

bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Jesus tells us that this life is a race to the bottom. The goal is to serve, not to be served. The goal is to sacrifice for others benefit rather than for our own. The goal is not to make a name for ourselves but to serve without recognition. The reward is eternal while the pain is temporary. The reward is far greater than the sacrifice. Be like Jesus.

Commands of Christ: 76

Have faith in God.

In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!" "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." Mark 11:20-24

If we are living and walking in the Holy Spirit, we can know that our words and actions and ways are in His will. He is able to bring about anything. We are not serving ourselves, but Him. We are not seeking our desires, but His. Let us not be shy about asking for anything we need to do so. His glory is a worthy cause. It is worth God's attention and resources. He can and will provide. Have the faith to ask.

Commands of Christ: 77

Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

They came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you are not concerned with anyone's opinion. You do not regard a person's status but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not? Should we pay or should we not pay?" Knowing their hypocrisy he said to them, "Why are you testing me? Bring me a denarius to look at." They brought one to him and he said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They replied to him, "Caesar's." So Jesus said to them, "Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." They were utterly amazed at him. Mark 12:14-17

They posed this question to him, “Teacher, we know that what you say and teach is correct, and you show no partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it lawful for us to pay tribute to Caesar or not?” Recognizing their craftiness he said to them, “Show me a denarius; whose image and name does it bear?” They replied, “Caesar’s.” So he said to them, “Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” Luke 20:21-25

They sent their disciples to him, with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. And you are not concerned with anyone’s opinion, for you do not regard a person’s status. Tell us, then, what is your opinion: Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?” Knowing their malice, Jesus said, “Why are you testing me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin that pays the census tax.” Then they handed him the Roman coin. He said to them, “Whose image is this and whose inscription?” They replied, “Caesar’s.” At that he said to them, “Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” Matthew 22:16-21

Be a good citizen of the earthly country in which you reside. More than that, however, be a good citizen of the Kingdom of God. All authority and honor belong to God. All kingdoms of the earth are under His rule. All creation is His, including our own selves. Our lives, our relationships, our possessions, are all His to do with whatever He pleases. We have the option to disregard this now, but if we do so, we will pay the price for eternity, suffering His wrath and punishment as His enemies. Far better, to recognize and honor His reign now and have the benefits of reigning with Him for all eternity.

Commands of Christ: 78

Beware of the scribes and do not imitate them.

In the course of his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to go around in long robes and accept greetings in the marketplaces, seats of honor in synagogues, and places of honor at banquets. They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext, recite lengthy prayers. They will receive a very severe condemnation.” Mark 12:38-40

Then, within the hearing of all the people, he said to his disciples, “Be on guard against the scribes, who like to go around in long robes and love greetings in marketplaces, seats of honor in synagogues, and places of honor at banquets. They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext, recite lengthy prayers. They will receive a very severe condemnation.” Luke 20:45-47

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, saying, “The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens hard to carry and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen. They widen their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation ‘Rabbi.’ As for you, do not be called ‘Rabbi.’ You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers. Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not be called ‘Master’; you have but one master, the Messiah. The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You lock the kingdom of heaven before human beings. You do not enter yourselves, nor do you allow entrance to those trying to enter. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You traverse sea and land to make one convert, and when that happens you make him a child of hell twice as much as yourselves. Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘If one swears by the temple, it means nothing, but if one swears by the gold of the temple, one is obligated.’ Blind fools, which is greater, the gold, or the temple that made the gold sacred? And you say, ‘If one swears by the altar, it means nothing, but if one swears by the gift on the altar, one is obligated.’ You blind ones, which is greater, the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? One who swears by the altar swears by it and all that is upon it; one who swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it; one who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who is seated on it. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity. But these you should have done, without neglecting the others. Blind guides, who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and every kind of filth. Even so, on the outside you appear righteous, but inside you are filled with hypocrisy and evildoing. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the memorials of the righteous, and you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have joined them in shedding the prophets’ blood.’ Thus you bear witness against yourselves that you are the children of those who murdered the prophets; now fill up what your ancestors measured out! You serpents, you brood of vipers, how can you flee from the judgment of hell? Therefore, behold, I send to you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, some of them you

will scourge in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, so that there may come upon you all the righteous blood shed upon earth, from the righteous blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. Matthew 23:1-36

Evidently, Jesus was not too fond of people who act religiously for the sake of appearance. He was pretty clear about the fact that those doing religious activities in order to enhance their reputation were not pleasing Him. Our reputation is not the point. His is. Our Christian celebrity culture is a dangerous thing. His Name is to be honored, not the name of His servants.

Humility is the hallmark of the King and His Kingdom and His true servants. Run from anything that seeks to draw you into the limelight. If people are going to follow you, make sure they are following you on the path to service and sacrifice rather than fame and glory.

Commands of Christ: 79

Watch out that no false Christ deceives you.

He answered, “See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he,’ and ‘The time has come.’ Do not follow them!” Luke 21:8-9

Jesus said to them in reply, “See that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and they will deceive many.” Matthew 24:4-5

Jesus began to say to them, “See that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name saying, ‘I am he,’ and they will deceive many.” Mark 13:5-6

I suppose it is natural for people to believe what they wish to be true. It is natural for us to desire Jesus’ return. Jesus warns His followers, however, not to be misled. When He returns, it will be very clear. Let us wait patiently for His return and not be led astray by our impatient desires.

Commands of Christ: 80

When you see signs of my return, do not be terrified, but take heart.

“When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for such things must happen first, but it will not immediately be the end.” Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be

powerful earthquakes, famines, and plagues from place to place; and awesome sights and mighty signs will come from the sky." Luke 21:9-11

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand." Luke 21:25-31

You will hear of wars and reports of wars; see that you are not alarmed, for these things must happen, but it will not yet be the end. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be famines and earthquakes from place to place. All these are the beginning of the labor pains. Then they will hand you over to persecution, and they will kill you. You will be hated by all nations because of my name. And then many will be led into sin; they will betray and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and deceive many and because of the increase of evildoing, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved. Matthew 24:6-13

When you hear of wars and reports of wars do not be alarmed; such things must happen, but it will not yet be the end. Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes from place to place and there will be famines. These are the beginnings of the labor pains. Mark 13:7-8

There is a saying, "It is darkest just before the dawn." Jesus was saying something like that in these passages. There will be tragedies and hard times before Jesus' triumphant return. We are not to grieve or fear these hardships as those who have no hope. We are to look beyond them to our promised reward and fellowship with our loving Lord for all eternity. Our hope gives us strength. We are not to respond out of fear but out of faith and so remain faithful to the end.

Commands of Christ: 81

Be alert for My return.

"Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man." Luke 21:34-36

“Therefore, keep watch, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” Matthew 25:13

Stay ready. Pray for strength. Be focused. Guard against distraction. Pay attention. These are instructions from Jesus. This life is preparation for the next. Don’t forget it.

Commands of Christ: 82

Follow and serve Me.

Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me. John 12:25-26

This is the eternally true version of the saying, “You can’t have your cake, and eat it too.” We can live for eternity or for this life, not both. We can serve God or material wealth, not both. We live for God or for ourselves, not both. Jesus modeled this. It turned out great for Him in eternity but not so well in this life. Follow His example. It turns out well in the end.

Commands of Christ: 83

Love each other.

“I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35

“This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” John 15:12-13

“This I command you: love one another.” John 15:7

Wow. This is pretty clear. This is the distinguishing mark of a follower of Jesus. We love each other.

How much? The same way Jesus loved us. Enough to die for one another.

Commands of Christ: 84

Take, eat, drink. Do this in remembrance of Me.

Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.” John 6:53-57

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.” Matthew 26:26-28

While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, “Take it; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many.” Mark 12:22-24

Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said, “Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you that from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.” Luke 22:17-20

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

We need reminders of God’s goodness and provision and sacrifice. In the same way the Old Testament festivals provided a visible reminder, the Lord’s Supper can do so for us. It is also an opportunity for us to proclaim it to others. Let us not fail to do so.

Commands of Christ: 85

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God and in Me.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me." John 14:1

Jesus said this in the context of the Last Supper. He said this to strengthen the hearts of the eleven disciples in anticipation of their confusion and fear at what was about to happen over the following 24 hours. He wanted them to know that none of it would take God by surprise. The future, His future, and their future with Him were assured. We need to take His instructions to heart in the midst of our own dark days when fear and confusion are real temptations.

Commands of Christ: 86

Believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.

"Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." John 14:11-14

This is one of the times when I find Jesus' words a challenge to believe. He says that if we believe in Him, we will do greater works than He did. Forgive my incredulity, but really? Yes, really. I may not be able to explain it, but it's true. We will glorify the Lord by doing these works. Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. Glorify Yourself in me and in those works. Help me so clearly and fully discern Your will and Your ways that I might recognize the good works You have prepared beforehand for me to walk in, and let me not miss doing a single one of them.

Commands of Christ: 87

Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid." John 14:27

Jesus gave this command in the middle of His promise to send the Holy Spirit to live within His followers. In other words, He gives this command in the context of giving us the means to obey it. If we are living in the Spirit, walking by the Spirit, we will not be fearful or have troubled hearts. He is peace just as he is love and joy and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control. Abide in Him.

Commands of Christ: 88

Remain in Me and in My love so you can keep My commands and vice versa.

"If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." John 14:15-18

Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. John 15:4-10

In regard to God, love and obedience are inseparable. Love is demonstrated by grateful obedience and obedience is enabled by our grateful love. We remain in God through our obedience because it is the expression of His presence. The same can be said of our love. His presence with us and His living in us are demonstrated by our loving obedience. He is literally living His life and will through us if we are His. The more clearly we hear Him and the more fully we discern His action in our lives, the more fully we can live out this obedient love. This is how we grow in Him and bear fruit by and for and to Him.

Commands of Christ: 89

Pray in My Name.

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” John 15:7-8

“Until now you have not asked anything in my name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.” John 16:24

We benefit through complete joy when we pray in His name and He answers. He benefits by glory going to God when we pray in His will and He answers. This is evidence of the fact that we are His. What possible reason could we have for not doing this? Let us obey Him in praying in His Name, remaining in His will.

Commands of Christ: 90

Take courage.

“I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world.” John 16:33

Jesus gives this command in the context of instructing the eleven disciples about the near future when He would be tortured and killed and things would look dark and hopeless. He was making it clear to them that God was in control, the future was bright, and that He was going to bring good out of apparent evil. He was winning despite all appearances. He wanted them to take the long view and allow that perspective to give them courage. The same thing is true for each of us who follows Him.

Commands of Christ: 91

Receive the Holy Spirit.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” John 20:19-23

This is the first post-resurrection appearance to the inner circle of disciples as a group (except for Thomas). This is a precursor of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given more broadly to His followers. Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to the

disciples in the context of sending them to continue His ministry of announcing the Kingdom of His grace and peace. This empowering and this ministry were not optional. The Spirit was necessary for carrying out this ministry. The same is true for each of us today. We are called and we are empowered and commanded.

Commands of Christ: 92

Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel.

He said to them, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature." Mark 16:15

Some manuscripts do not include this portion of Mark. In any case, this command is consistent with other passages. Jesus has completion on His mind and in His heart. It needs to be on our minds and in our hearts as well. He is worthy. Every creature needs to know it. His greatness and goodness and grace are news which we need to get to every corner of the globe. Everyone needs to hear it.

Commands of Christ: 93

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey all My commands.

Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus tells us when and where to make disciples, as we are going. He tells us how to make disciples, baptizing and teaching to obey all His commands. He tells us who is to do it, the same people to whom His promise of His presence is to…all His followers. He tells us by what authority to make disciples, His (complete) authority. In one sense, this is the primary command of Christ, because in it, all His other commands are included. In making disciples, we are ourselves obeying all His commands and teaching others to do the same. If you have to prioritize one command above all others, make it this one. Make disciples.

Commands of Christ: 94

Hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

“Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the victor I will give the right to eat from the tree of life that is in the garden of God.” Revelation 2:7

“Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The victor shall not be harmed by the second death.” Revelation 2:11

“Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the victor I shall give some of the hidden manna; I shall also give a white amulet upon which is inscribed a new name, which no one knows except the one who receives it.” Revelation 2:17

“To the victor, who keeps to my ways until the end, I will give authority over the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. Like clay vessels will they be smashed, just as I received authority from my Father. And to him I will give the morning star. Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 2:26-29

“The victor will thus be dressed in white, and I will never erase his name from the book of life but will acknowledge his name in the presence of my Father and of his angels. Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 3:5-6

“The victor I will make into a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never leave it again. On him I will inscribe the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, as well as my new name. Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 3:12-13

“I will give the victor the right to sit with me on my throne, as I myself first won the victory and sit with my Father on his throne. Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 3:21-22

These of course are the commands of Jesus in His letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation. Each of these commands gives a promise to those who are victorious in following Him. To those who persevere. To those who listen to the Spirit. These are for our encouragement and motivation. There will be tests. There will be difficult days. It will all be worth it in the end. The rewards are worth the sacrifice. Hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Quick Review of "Obedience Verses" Spoken by Jesus

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you." John 14:15-17

"Jesus answered and said to him, "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him. Whoever does not love Me does not keep My words; yet the word you hear is not Mine but that of the Father Who sent me." John 14:23-24

"If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in His love." John 15:10

"Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven." Matthew 5:19

"Everyone who listens to these words of Mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of Mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined." Matthew 7:24-27

"To the victor, who keeps to My ways until the end, I will give authority over the nations." Revelation 2:26

"Remember then how you accepted and heard; keep it, and repent. If you are not watchful, I will come like a thief, and you will never know at what hour I will come upon you." Revelation 3:3

"Because you have kept my message of endurance, I will keep you safe in the time of trial that is going to come to the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth." Revelation 3:10

Obey GC²

(Obey the Great Commandment and Great Commission)

a blog series by Curtis Sergeant

2006

What are you living for?

Hopefully it is more than trying to make as much money as possible or gain as much power as possible for the purpose of living a life of hedonism. There is nothing wrong with pleasure and comfort, but you were made for more than that. God has a purpose for your life. It is to glorify Him. There are lots of ways to do this. In fact, most activities and pursuits can be done in such a way that they glorify God (unless they inherently wrong in and of themselves).

Glorifying God can also be called worship. There are some ways in which we should all be glorifying God. First, we should acknowledge Him and commit ourselves to following His instructions and guidance for our lives. We should also encourage others in the pursuit of a life of worship. We should continually grow in our likeness to Jesus Christ's character. We should serve others and look out for their interests as well as our own. We should seek to draw others into a relationship with God if they don't already know him. Conveniently, these facets of living a life of worship are gathered into a couple of summary statements in the Bible.

One time (Matthew 22:36-40) a Jewish lawyer asked Jesus, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: **"'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."**

This is referred to as the Great Commandment.

Just before Jesus ascended to heaven, He gave His disciples their final instructions. This was a crucial event because He knew He would never see them again in the flesh. In Matthew 28:18-20 the Bible says, "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"**

This is referred to as the Great Commission.

This blog is about the ethos of the ObeyGC^2 Life which can be summarized as an attempt to help people live out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission as effectively as possible. ObeyGC^2 is read as "obey GC squared" and by now you might have guessed that GC squared refers to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. ObeyGC^2 is an attempt to expand the Kingdom of God by catalyzing a movement of Christ's followers working together to bring about greater glory to God and doing what they can to see His will done on earth as it is in heaven. This blog will address my take on what that might look like in practical implementation.

Definition 1

ObeyGC^2 is a movement seeking to mobilize and equip every person to become a follower of Jesus and live out the Great Commandment and Great Commission in collaboration.

ObeyGC^2 is about getting *everyone* involved. It is about training them to do what they can't already do (in a continuous cycle of growth). It is focused on obedience to God. It is about cooperative effort.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Definition 2

ObeyGC^2 is far more than missions. ObeyGC^2 is an expression of discipleship, involving us in the investment of who we are and what we have in doing and teaching all that Christ commanded with keen stewardship.

Discipleship is the process of following Jesus. The phrase "doing and teaching all that Christ commanded" is a reference to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 and is a summary of what Jesus said it meant to make disciples. Stewardship is a key idea of being a faithful follower and is integral to the ethos of ObeyGC^2 All that we have and all that we are is a gift of God. To show our love and gratitude we need to make the most of it for His pleasure and His glory.

1 Cor 4:2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

Definition 3

ObeyGC^2 is ordinary people empowered by God making a difference together wherever they are.

On one hand, it is for everyone. On the other hand, it's only fully possible for those who are followers of Christ, those who are filled with the Holy Spirit. It is aimed at changing the status quo for God's purposes at all times and in all places.

1 Cor 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Definition 4

ObeyGC^2 is helping people help themselves and others.

It isn't only about doing good or doing the right thing. It's also about doing things in the right way; the most effective way; the way that will ultimately have the greatest possible impact for good. This means capacity building. It means blessing others in such a way that they can and will bless others.

Eph 5:15-16 Be very careful, then, how you live-not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Anti-definition 1

ObeyGC^2 isn't saved people who are healthy, wealthy and wise. Rather it is Reproducing disciple-servants who are generous healers and teachers.

The goal is not only to raise peoples standard of living or education or health but to help them realize and achieve their God-given calling and purpose to be a blessing to others. Those with faith in God are spiritually children of Abraham to whom God gave the following promise.

Gen 12:2-3
"I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
3 I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."

Contributors, not Consumers

ObeyGC^2 is about us becoming contributors rather than consumers; living a life aimed at giving and catalyzing rather than comfort and convenience; being characterized by doing and teaching rather than fruitless hypocrisy.

It is for people who want to serve rather than being served; people who want to make a difference and make the world a better place. It is for people who are serious about wanting to follow Jesus and follow His example.

Matt 20:25-28
25 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you.

Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave- 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Glory of God

ObeyGC^2 is all about the glory of God and His mission in the world; about His Kingdom.

This is what all of life and history is about as well. This is an expression of worship ***and*** is intended to draw others into a life of worship and service to the One who created us and loves us. There is no higher calling and no greater way to invest one's life, energy, and time.

Matt 5:14-16

14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Believing Activism

The world has more than enough inactive believers and unbelieving activists. ObeyGC^2 is about becoming believing activists.

It is always amazing to me that people who claim to believe in and follow Jesus so often do not live as if that is the case. What is perhaps more amazing is the surprising number of people who have beliefs which should lead (if really believed) to a life of self-centered hedonism but actually engage in some tremendously selfless and altruistic behaviors. It's crazy! I am led to suspect that many people have a serious chasm between their stated beliefs and their actual worldview. I can't explain it and I can only guess at some of the causes. Is it too much to ask for people to live out true beliefs ***and*** right behaviors?

Mic 6:8
8 He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

Prophetic

ObeyGC^2 is about becoming prophets who do not merely predict the future, but seek to change it.

I forgot who first said it, but I love this quote: "Some people look at the way the world is and ask 'why?' I look at what could be and ask 'why not?'" As admirable as that is, it is close to meaningless unless one does something about it. The environmentalists got a lot right with their slogan, "Think globally, act locally." Nike put it even more concisely with their byline, "Just Do It."

James 2:14-17

14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Ordinary Radicals

ObeyGC^2 aims to build small communities of ordinary radicals who do small things with great love.

It is a joint effort. It doesn't take people with unusual intelligence, ability, or wealth. It does require people who are serious, intentional and focused...the sort of people who could be called radicals. Their focus is on living day-to-day and moment-to-moment in such a way as to serve others and glorify God; to live a life of love.

Col 3:17
17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Transformative Stories

ObeyGC^2 is spread through the stories of the transformative power of God working in and through people.

Stories are a powerful communication tool in any society and any age. They grip us. I love the story of the healing of the man born blind in John 9. The frustration of the Pharisees, who were trying desperately to discredit Jesus, was obvious. There was simply no way to refute the power and love of Jesus when the man who was healed was simply telling how Jesus had changed his life. Life-changing good news travels fast.

John 9:24-33

24 A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."

25 He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

26 Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

27 He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?"

28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

30 The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. 32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

Orthopraxy

ObeyGC[2] is not merely about believing the right things, but about following the right One. It is about living, not theorizing.

Ivory tower theoreticians need not apply. Philosophizing doesn't help. Acting does. There seems to be so much concern over ortho*doxy* these days but not nearly enough attention paid to ortho*praxy*. Right belief matters a great deal but that isn't the major problem with people. The major problem is with right behavior.

James 2:14-19

14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. 19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-and shudder.

Obedience

ObeyGC^2 is not about explaining the parts of the Bible you don't understand but about living out the parts you do understand.

What is the use about arguing about the meaning of Scripture if you don't obey the parts we are all crystal clear about? Until we obey what we have heard and understood, we will have serious problems with our life in the eternal perspective. What could possibly be more important than obeying what Jesus told us to do? He evidently thought it was pretty important...

Matt 7:24-27

24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

Live It

ObeyGC^2 is not about criticizing the church as it is, but about becoming the church we were meant to be.

There is a quote which I have kept on my desk for well over a decade through many moves to various countries. It is attributed to Theodore Roosevelt and is hard to beat for expressing my sentiments on this topic.

"It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly, who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who, at the worst, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

Matt 7:1-5
7:1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the

speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Asking "Why?"

I asked God why He allows all the spiritual darkness, abusive leadership, poverty, illness and ignorance in the world. He replied, "Ask rather, 'Why do *we* allow this to happen?' You are my body, my hands, my feet."

Ever since the garden of Eden mankind has been pointing the finger at someone else and blaming them for all that has gone wrong. God is looking for someone who will take responsibility rather than shifting it.

Matt 25:31-46

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.
34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'
37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'
40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'
41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'
44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'
45 "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'
46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Metrics

The measure of us as followers of Christ is not how much we have studied His word, but how much we are living it.

Metrics are important. There is some truth in the old maxim, "What gets measured gets done." The United Nations has set forth some laudable goals for dealing with disease, poverty, and lack of education in their Millennial Goals. The trick will be people trying to take credit for improvements which will not have a clear cause and everyone trying to avoid blame when things take major turns for the worse. Issues such as famine, wars, political corruption and so on make it tough to achieve such goals. Don't get me wrong, I think such goal-setting is a positive step. It is only the first step, however. Action must follow. As followers of Christ we should try to contribute to the reaching of those goals and to the reaching of goals set by Jesus in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Studying those goals will not accomplish much either. We must act on them. Start with a single step.

James 1:22-25, 27

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it-he will be blessed in what he does.

27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Motive

Acts of ObeyGC^2 without love are emptiness. True ObeyGC^2 is love in action.

Motive matters. We can love others and love God because God first loved us. There is no earning of celestial "brownie points" by doing good deeds. Our good deeds are an expression of our love for God and others or they are worthless.

Isa 64:6a
6 All of us have become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.

1 Sam 16:7b
"The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

1 Cor 13:3
3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Discomfort

The message of ObeyGC^2 comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.

Kay Warren, the wife of Rick Warren (pastor of Saddleback Church and author of "The Purpose Driven Life") calls herself a "seriously disturbed woman." You see, she has been brutally seized by a deep passion for ending the suffering inflicted on people by HIV-AIDS. Are you seriously disturbed or are you fairly comfortable and happy with the status quo when it comes to the welfare of others? The message of ObeyGC^2 will disturb you if you are comfortable. It provides hope for those who are already disturbed.

Heb 13:3
3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Isa 1:17
17 learn to do right!
Seek justice,
encourage the oppressed.
Defend the cause of the fatherless,
plead the case of the widow.

Prov 31:8-9

8 "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,
for the rights of all who are destitute.
9 Speak up and judge fairly;
defend the rights of the poor and needy."

Being and Doing

As an agent of ObeyGC^2 I should concern myself not only with what I am doing, but in what I am becoming. An agent of ObeyGC^2 is a lover of God and of people.

I doubt anyone is much more eager for heaven than I am. Usually multiple times a day I use the word *Maranatha* (Hebrew for "Come Lord!") with a full awareness of its meaning and intent. Around our home my wife and I say, "Now would be a really good time (for Jesus to return)" almost daily. The Lord is leaving us here for several reasons. One is that He has specific things in mind for me to do. Probably just as

importantly, He has a clear picture in mind for what He wants me to become...like Jesus. That might take a while...

Rom 8:28-29
29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Phil 1:6
6 [I am] confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Eph 2:10
10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Occupation

God uses all sorts. It does not matter if you are a butcher, a baker or a candlestick-maker. The question is what sort of butcher, baker or candlestick-maker will you be?

Lots of people seem to think they can only serve God effectively if they are doing it as a full-time occupation. Nothing could be further from the truth. Actually, people who serve full-time have a difficult time even connecting with a world in need in many cases. Unless you earn your living doing something that is just plain wrong, you can serve and glorify God right where you are. If you are in the pornography business or you are a drug dealer or you are a "hit man" then please find something else to do. The rest of us need to figure out how to most effectively be God's hands and feet where we are. Like the bumper stickers say, "Bloom where you are planted." Of course we also need to be concerned about and acting on behalf of those who are beyond where we are day-to-day, but that will be another blog entry...

1 Cor 7:19b-24
Keeping God's commands is what counts. 20 Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. 21 Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you-although if you can gain your freedom, do so. 22 For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. 23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. 24 Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to.

Eph 6:5-9
5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. 6 Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. 7 Serve

wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, 8 because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Materialism

ObeyGC^2 is not for those who only want what they can own.

One of the biggest problems in the world is that many people are only concerned about their own welfare and the welfare of those who are personally cherished by them. We've all heard the statistics about how there is more than enough food to feed everyone in the world but so many people are starving because of distribution issues. Yet somehow, here in the United States where I live at present, obesity is a major health problem. What's up with that? The same could be said for just about any other resource necessary for living a healthy life. The wealthy hoard far more than they need or can reasonably use while many suffer to an extreme degree due to a chronic shortage of whatever it is. I don't want to get into an in-depth discussion on forms of government here. I'm simply saying that a lot of these issues would improve significantly if people thought (and cared) about others. Why do we hoard what is temporary and ignore the more important matters, eternal matters of the heart?

2 Cor 4:18
18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Phil 2:3-7
3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
7 but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

Involvement

The great tragedy among rich Christians is not that they do not care about the poor, but that they rarely even know the poor.

This is one of the sad things about gated communities or even the way most of the world is divided up into neighborhoods which are essentially systems of segregation based on socioeconomic levels. I don't have a ready solution for this. I live in a neighborhood like this. It is a wonderful mix of various Asian ethnicities, a number of Hispanic families of various origins, African Americans, and Caucasians...but we are all firmly in the middle class. I have to go out of my way to interact with anyone living in poverty. This isn't because they don't live in the town where I live or the town where I work. I drive past such people every day, standing on street corners waiting to be hired for some sort of daily odd job. I don't really see them, though. They are not at my workplace or in my home or where I shop. It's difficult to really love someone you have never met except in some sort of hollow philosophical way...not with a love that has hands and feet.

Luke 14:12-14

12 Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Hypocrisy

Most people in the U.S.A. can tell you what Christians believe, but watch the confusion in their eyes if you ask them how Christians live.

That is sad.

I've often heard it said, "You may be the only Bible someone ever reads." Originally the term "Christians" (which means little Christs) was meant as a derogatory term. Early followers of Jesus were known as "followers of The Way." The term "Christian" stuck because followers of Jesus loved it. It communicated exactly what they were trying and hoping to be. I don't know what nicknames you've heard lately for Christians, but I'm guessing they don't mean "little Christs."

Luke 11:39-42

39 Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. 40 You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? 41 But give what is inside [the dish] to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

42 "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone."

Preparation to Live and Die

ObeyGC^2 does not merely offer people life after death, but also gives them a taste of life before death. It doesn't only prepare them to die, but also teaches them how to live.

I'm not sure it's possible "to be so heavenly minded that you are no earthly good." At least not if you really understand what it means to be heavenly minded. That would mean seeing things as God sees them; caring about what He cares about; valuing what He values; loving the ones He loves. The fact of the matter is that God seems to care a great deal about the welfare of those who suffer.

Ex 22:21-23

21 "Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt.

22 Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. 23 If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry."

John 10:10b
[Jesus said,] I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Luke 18:29-30

29 "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God 30 will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

Fish

ObeyGC^2 doesn't simply give people fish. It teaches them to fish. It shows them how to sell fish. It tears down walls erected around the fish pond. It figures out who polluted the fish pond and helps clean it up.

You've probably heard the famous saying often attributed to Confucius (but which actually came into being much later): "If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime." That saying makes a great point. It would be even better if we taught the man how to teach others to fish so we could feed his entire village for a lifetime (and beyond if he taught others the same thing). ObeyGC^2 is about all of that and all the related issues that arise from it. It is about people's welfare and about community and relationships. It is wholistic. [I know it is spelled holistic, but I'm trying to start a trend :-)] It is about building a better world for the good of mankind and the glory of God. It is a virtuous cycle that feeds itself if we are faithful to put into practice what we learn and pass it on to others.

Prov 11:24-27

24 One man gives freely, yet gains even more;
another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.

25 A generous man will prosper;
he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

26 People curse the man who hoards grain,
but blessing crowns him who is willing to sell.

27 He who seeks good finds goodwill,
but evil comes to him who searches for it.

Opposition

ObeyGC^2 is not about charity. Jesus wasn't about charity. He wasn't crucified for charity. He was crucified for living out a love which calls forth a new world order and disrupts the existing social order.

Jesus was a threat to Satan. He was a threat to the Jewish leaders of His day. He was a threat to the power structures and to people who were prospering at the expense of others. He was a threat to everyone's self-serving lives and selfish lifestyles. He came to serve. He came to sacrifice and suffer and die on behalf of others (all of us). He came to call us to follow His example. If we do, we will suffer the same fate of being hated and misunderstood because the same forces which opposed Him will oppose us.

Matt 10:25
25 It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!

Luke 9:23-26

23 Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. 25 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? 26 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Difficult but Not Complex

ObeyGC^2 is simple but not easy.

Have you ever noticed that the really powerful ideas and concepts are easy to say but not to do? Reading the Bible and even understanding most of it is pretty easy. Living your life based on what it says is impossible apart from the Holy Spirit whom God gives to those who give their lives to Him. (In fact, one appellation of the Holy Spirit is the one "whom God has given to those who obey Him." in Acts 5:32.) The various definitions of ObeyGC^2 I put forth in previous postings are all pretty simple conceptually. They all come down to living out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Ultimately, you and I have no control over what others do in this regard. The question is, how will I respond? How will you respond? The price is high. Count on it.

Luke 14:25-35

25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters-yes, even his own life-he cannot be my disciple. 27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29 For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

34 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? 35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Faith, Hope and Love

ObeyGC^2 agents believe so much in another world that they cannot help but begin to create it now.

I'm not talking about some sort of post-millennial Dominionism. I'm talking about working toward what Jesus prayed for, that God's will might be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). In other words, they live a life of love for God and others. They do this because of the hope they have which arises from faith in God and the future He has promised. Frankly, I can hardly wait. Day-to-day, I find in my own life that the faith and hope parts are a lot easier than the love part. The faith and hope only

directly relate to God. (I know, I know, the faith and hope have implications for my relating to others, but for the sake of this blog entry, I'm saying those implications are bound up in love.) The love part requires I love others. That's often not an easy thing when it comes down to my daily decisions and lifestyle. That's the hard work of beginning to create the future we believe and hope in, here and now.

Phil 3:17-20

17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Clear Vision

Do you want to know who the true Christians are? Ask the poor. Ask the suffering. Ask the disfranchised. Ask the prisoner.

Sometimes it is confusing down here on earth. It would be wonderful to have the insight of heaven; to be able to see hearts; to be able to discern motives; to see the end from the beginning. Unfortunately, I don't even fully see and understand my own heart or discern my own motives. There are some people who see more clearly than others, however. They are the disadvantaged. For some reason, all the benefits and blessings we experience tend to cloud our view to an extent. When these things are taken away, there is one benefit: clearer vision. Suddenly, peoples' motives are clearer and eternal values become more obvious.

Col 3:1-2
3:1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

1 Cor 4:3b-5
I do not even judge myself. 4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

Matt 25:31-46

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he

will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

45 "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Discipleship

Jesus is not to be admired, but followed.

I've always appreciated the argument made by C.S. Lewis that because of Jesus' claims, He must be considered as either a lunatic, a liar, or the Lord of heaven and earth. He says that there cannot be any "patronising nonsense" about Him being a great moral teacher. If you've never read the short, simple classic, "Mere Christianity," then I suggest you do so. It is a very quick read and is the sort of book where you will feel you've learned nothing "new" but it has helped you frame familiar issues in new ways. (I also greatly appreciate his chapter on pride.)

John 12:24-26
24 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains

only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

John 10:27
27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

Risk

Perhaps many people have such a difficult time believing in heaven because Christians take so few risks.

My guess is that this is the case due to the fact that so many Christians focus on the temporal rather than the eternal. Part of sinful human nature seems to be that we think about what is visible more than about what is invisible. Unfortunately, the things we think about tend to become the things we value. The things we value shape the decisions we make. Soon we can find ourselves making decisions based on the wrong things. Risk-taking (in regard to earthly, temporary things) should be no big deal for Christians if it is for the sake of God's Kingdom, which is eternal. If this were true more often, I believe it would get people's attention in a remarkable fashion.

Matt 16:21-23

21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

1 John 2:15-17

15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world-the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

2 Cor 4:16-18

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles

are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Fear

Jesus said we should not fear what can kill the body, but what can kill the soul. We should not fear the "violent" inner cities but the suburbs which can eat away and numb our souls with complacency and comfort.

Okay, Jesus actually said "who" can kill, not "what" can kill. The principle still applies. I suspect the root of the fear is actually a love of physical comfort and safety which are often coupled with a love of money. If we become involved in "dangerous" and needy places, it will place a burden on our resources, time, and money. Why risk all that when we can simply minister in the 'burbs?

Luke 12:4-5

4 "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him."

Luke 16:9-15
9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.
10 "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. 11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?
13 "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."
14 The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. 15 He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

Change Agents

ObeyGC[2] practitioners are disturbers of the status quo. If the "powers that be" do not hate us, we may not be truly representing God's Kingdom.

Don't be deceived into thinking that you will be praised and honored because you are following Jesus and doing what He commanded. It definitely didn't work out that way for Him. People who should be encouraging and supportive for the sake of the

Kingdom will oppose you and do things which seem horrifyingly evil. Cheer up! That is actually a sign you are on the right track. By the way, there is no neutral party in the cosmic battle. If you aren't on God's side, you're against Him. When "push comes to shove" there will be no one neutral about your efforts for His Kingdom either.

Luke 23:20-31

20 Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. 21 But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

22 For the third time he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him."

23 But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. 24 So Pilate decided to grant their demand. 25 He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

26 As they led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. 27 A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. 28 Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' 30 Then

"'they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!"
and to the hills, "Cover us!" '

31 For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Matt 5:10-12
10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

John 16:1-4
2 They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. 3 They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me.

Matt 24:9-10

9 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.

Matt 12:30

30 "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.

Community

Communities of ObeyGC[2] are built around a shared brokenness, not a shared self-righteousness.

The Kingdom of God is a relational affair. Discipleship has fellowship as a vital aspect. When we are "discipling" someone, we do them a disservice if it is strictly a one-on-one experience. That is like trying to teach someone to play basketball only through one-on-one drills. That may be fine for ball control, but they will have no concept of very important aspects of the game: passing, many aspects of defense, pick-and-rolls, off-ball screens, and so on. Individualistic expressions of discipleship are fine as far as they go. Unfortunately, they don't go very far. God has called us to live in community. His Kingdom is a community and is based on our relationship to Him and to each other. The basis of this is His grace, not our glowing personalities or lovable natures or any other characteristic we may pride ourselves in.

Eph 4:1-6
2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to one hope when you were called- 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Rom 12:3-5
3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. 4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Life!

Jesus isn't aiming to make bad people good, but to make dead people live. We aren't about morality, but about abundant life.

Of course, those who receive this abundant life from Christ will be good, but that's not the point. In several of his letters, the Apostle Paul writes that we are supposed to "take off" evil deeds and "put on" a righteous character because of the new life we

have from God. These are the result, however, not the cause. The cause is the new life we have in Christ. The upshot is that we are to be involved in helping others find this life as well.

John 10:9-11
9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. 11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Gal 2:20-21
20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

2 Cor 5:17-21
17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Love/Hate

ObeyGC[2] practitioners are known as those who love outcasts, not those who hate "gays".

I don't know how it happened. Somehow Christians, especially evangelical Christians, got a reputation for hating homosexuals. Perhaps some do. One thing is clear: Jesus didn't. God clearly forbids homosexuality in the Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. He also forbids pride. And lust. And lies. Etc.

Somehow, particularly since the nineteenth century, sexual sins have come to be considered more serious than other sins. They are bad...as bad as other sins...but not any worse. In fact, if I was forced to rank sins on their seriousness, I'd put pride at the top of the list. I'll have to write on that another day.

The appropriate response to homosexual individuals is to love them and try to draw them to Jesus where they can receive the power and the will to change their lifestyle. This is how it works for people who are bound by other sins. This is how it needs to work with homosexuals as well. They are not the enemy of Christians. They are bound by the enemy of Christians and they need to be released...the same way those of us who are already Christians were formerly bound by the enemy and released by Christ.

Jude 22-23

22 Be merciful to those who doubt; 23 snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear-hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

John 8:1-11
8:1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. 3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4 and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

11 "No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Rom 6:16-23
16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

19 I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. 20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. 21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

Eph 6:11-13
12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Extremism

These are extreme times that call for extremists. ObeyGC[2] practitioners are extremists for love.

Imagine a world in which the headlines shouted out reports of extremists who were turning the world upside-down by returning good for evil. We actually do see such reports from time to time even in the mainstream media. They are rarely the headlines, but they are attached to articles or stories about unspeakable atrocities perpetrated by heartless terrorists, recently often Islamic extremists. Survivors or family members of those who have been killed speak of forgiveness and even love. Those people are are also extremists and in every case I have seen they are radically following Jesus. They are extremists for love. Their response glorifies God and mystifies many observers. The more closely the world examines the situation, the more glory God receives. Extreme darkness provides a greater contrast for the light to shine forth. Let's commit ourselves to shine consistently so when the opportunity arises we will be ready. We should also seek out dark surroundings in order to maximize our impact for God's Kingdom.

Matt 5:43-48

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

2 Cor 8:1-6
8:1 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

Symbols

The symbols of the church have included the Lamb, the Lion, the Dove, and the Fish, but never the Chameleon.

George Barna is a widely published and oft-quoted pollster and researcher. One of the most disturbing discoveries he has made through studying the state of churches and Christians in the USA is that there is essentially no difference in the ethics of actual behavior between those who claim to be born-again Christians and those who don't. I'm not talking about standards that people purport to hold, but how they actually behave. This is stunning and exceedingly sad. This is certainly not the situation God is looking for. He desires (and commands) that we be people who think differently and as a result, act differently. The power for this does not lie in ourselves (which I believe is the largest part of the problem in the USA now) but in the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us. Let us walk in the Spirit rather than in our own strength and wisdom.

Rom 12:2
2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will.

1 Peter 1:13-16

13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. 14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Focus

ObeyGC[2] doesn't focus so much on what we are against that we forget what we are for.

This is another way of encouraging us to be people who learn to see the glass as half full rather than half empty. Focus on the positive. What can we do to encourage one another to do more of what's right? I've heard from several sources (so I don't know if any of them is original) that we should seek to make at least four positive, reinforcing comments for every negative correction. This is not something I'm naturally good at. Many times I feel as if I'm doing well if I achieve a one-to-one ratio. "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar." We will likely be more influential in the lives of others and in achieving significant impact in society if we learn to leverage positive reinforcement more effectively. For now, I'm determined to work towards at least a two-to-one ration of affirmations to criticisms...

John 3:17
17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Heb 10:24-25
24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Tough Path

ObeyGC[2] will not be attractive to everyone. The invitation to come and suffer and sacrifice and give and die is not convenient, comfortable or attractive to those who have a lot to lose or who fear risk.

Ironically, it is the people who are most satisfied now who are the least likely to get what's worth having in the long run. This is a good way to summarize the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:2-10. Evidently, of all the temptations to cling to something that's available now at great cost to one's eternal welfare, money is one of the most powerful. I base this on the fact that Jesus spent so much time talking about it. There are plenty of other things and people which can short-circuit our commitment to the Lord...anything which keeps us from following Him unreservedly. Is there anything you are unwilling to sacrifice if the Lord asks you to?

Matt 6:24

24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Matt 19:16-24

16 Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

17 "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments."

18 "Which ones?" the man inquired.

Jesus replied, "'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, 19 honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

20 "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

22 When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Object of Love

Love can build or destroy community, depending on its object. One who loves *the dream* of an ideal community will destroy it; one who loves *those around them* will build it.

Christians can be harsh, mean, judgmental, and condemning in the name of God if they view themselves as defending orthodoxy, purity, and the "right" way. Of course, orthodoxy, purity, and the "right" way are all important, but there is an appropriate spirit in which to correct people and a correct procedure to follow when making such corrections. The "Golden Rule" is a good measure here: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Luke 6:31). We should help others improve out of a spirit of love, not vindictiveness or an accusatory stance. Most often people want to do the best possible job in serving the Lord and in following Him. Usually they simply haven't been shown a better way.

Gal 6:1
6:1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

Matt 11:18-19

18 "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners." ' But wisdom is proved right by her actions."

Matt 18:15-17

15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

Luke 9:49-56

49 John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name; and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow along with us."

50 But Jesus said to him, "Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you."

51 When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem;

52 and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him.

53 But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem.

54 When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"

55 But He turned and rebuked them, [and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of;

56 for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."] And they went on to another village.

NASU

Journey

The *mean*s of ObeyGC[2] must express the *end* we desire; the journey is as essential as the destination.

The end does not justify the means, *especially* when the end is the Kingdom of God and His glory. The message and the messenger must match. The delivery must be consistent with the message. Any type of training will be most effective when it includes a model. Being a disciple is, by definition, being a follower. We can best equip others to follow when we show them how to follow. Being a good model requires doing the right thing in the best way that can be emulated by the person you are modeling for. This is a big topic which I will come back to later...

1 Cor 11:1
11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Phil 3:17

17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

1 Tim 4:12
12 Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.

Col 2:6-7

6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

1 John 1:5-7
5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

Change the World

ObeyGC^2 will be carried out by little bands of ordinary radicals. Can that change the world? That's the only way it's ever been done!

For good or ill, this is how it has happened. The greatest example is the rag-tag bunch we refer to as Jesus' disciples. They were certainly ordinary (until Jesus and the Holy Spirit transformed them). They were unquestionably radicals. They have changed the world beyond reckoning. We are their spiritual descendants. Let's live up to our heritage. We have the same Lord, the same God, the same Spirit, the same Kingdom, the same purpose, the same calling, the same power. What are we waiting for?

Acts 17:6b-7
They dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too."
NKJV

1 Cor 1:18-25

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand

miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

Repentance

The world isn't being changed by "altar calls." ObeyGC² is an *alter* call.

The word "repent" actually means to change one's mind. The idea is to turn around; change direction. At the bottom of this idea is a change from serving oneself and one's own desires and values and give one's allegiance instead to Christ. His values, His desires, His direction are adopted as one's own. This can be viewed as a change from pride to an attitude of humility; from seeing oneself as king to seeing Christ as King. That means all that I am, all that I'm not, all that I have, all that I hope to be are His. It also means I actively seek what His desires for me are. The best place to find this sort of information is in the Bible. The best summary of this can probably be found in the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

Matt 18:1-4
18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

2 He called a little child and had him stand among them. 3 And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

2 Tim 3:16-17
16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

ObeyGC² Byline 1

ObeyGC²: Living out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission

This is probably the most all-encompassing summary of ObeyGC² It makes it abundantly clear that ObeyGC² is about living a life of discipleship. The first entry in this blog addresses this foundational issue. Belief in the right things is worthless and meaningless if you aren't living out those beliefs.

James 2:8-19
8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as

yourself," you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. 19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-and shudder.

ObeyGC² Byline 2

ObeyGC²: Helping people help themselves and others

The primary emphasis communicated in this summary is that of the intentionally reproductive and multiplicative nature of service characterized by ObeyGC² values. We are blessed to be a blessing. That is the upshot of the call of Abraham and the promise God made to him. We are spiritual descendants of Abraham and inherit the same calling and the same promise. This was God's intention for the nation of Israel as well, although they did rather less well in fulfilling it. We are the spiritual Israel, adopted into God's family. Let's live it out.

Matt 10:7-8
7 As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

Luke 12:48b
From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

2 Tim 2:1b-3
Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. 3 Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

ObeyGC² Byline 3

ObeyGC²: Slaying the global evil giants virally

Pun intended. The global evil giants of spiritual emptiness (lostness), self-serving leadership (which leads to all sorts of injustice and suffering), grinding poverty, pandemic diseases, and crippling ignorance are foes so large that no one has been able to defeat them. The United Nations, the United States, business, military, government, no one. By most measures we have been losing ground on all these fronts when the global situation is considered. Perhaps the brightest of these is the battle against lostness, but even though the church is growing faster than it ever has in history, it still isn't keeping pace with population growth.

The church has not played the role it should in any of these battles. The biggest problem has been that most of the manpower in the church is sidelined for no good reason. For some reason, most of us have been led to believe that the only significant contribution which can be made in these battles is by professionals because the giants are so big and so intimidating. The fact of the matter is that all of us who pledge allegiance to God are called and equipped to be in the battle against these giants at all times. We are all "soldiers" and "priests" and "prophets" and "kings" whether or not we are professional missionaries, trainers, business gurus, doctors, or teachers. The more quickly we can spread this message and model it for others in a "viral" fashion, the more quickly we can make a difference in the epic battle against the giants. Snowflakes by themselves are fragile, but when enough of them get together they can stop traffic, close down a city, or even create an avalanche. If enough ordinary people are involved doing the simple things they can do and getting those they are helping involved as well, the faster we can win this battle.

Let's be like Joshua and Caleb who gave the good report after spying out the land of Canaan. The other ten spies looked at the giants and the great walled cities and said Israel would be unable to take the land. Joshua and Caleb looked at their God and said, "He will surely give us the land." The people followed the advice of the ten and had to wander in the wilderness and die for another forty years. Joshua and Caleb alone survived from their generation and they were proved right when God did give them the land forty years later when they finally had the courage to obey Him and attack the giants.

Num 13:27-28a, 30-32 ;14:1-3, 6-10a
27 They gave Moses this account: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. 28 But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large."

30 Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."

31 But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." 32 And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size.

14:1 That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. 2 All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! 3 Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?"

6 Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes 7 and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. 8 If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. 9 Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them."
10 But the whole assembly talked about stoning them.

ObeyGC² Byline 4

ObeyGC²: Contagious improvement

If we are going to make things better, it will take all of us practicing what we preach. Nobody wants to emulate dry hypocrisy. I'm far more likely to buy something from someone if they are a user of the product themselves and are a raving fan. This means we must do ObeyGC² *and* train others to do it and train still others. This sort of a virtuous cycle creates a contagious movement...the sort of movement that can change the world!

Matt 5:19
19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Ex 18:20
20 Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform.

Ezra 7:9-10
The good hand of his God was upon him. 10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

NASU

ObeyGC² Byline 5

ObeyGC²: Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven

This of course is one of the opening lines to the Lord's Prayer, also known as the Model Prayer. It says in familiar King James Version, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:9a-10). This, of course, is the bottom line for all of us who claim the Lord as our King. This motive of loving service to our Savior and Lord is the reason behind our obedience to His desires and commands. That is the reason for ObeyGC² The Kingdom of God is where His will is done. We express the Kingdom whenever we do His will. Until the final day when Christ returns in glory to establish His eternal Kingdom, when every knee will bow to Him, we must do what we can to make sure as many as possible bow in loving obedience rather than as vanquished foes. ObeyGC² is one way for us to accomplish that end.

Phil 2:9-11
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

ObeyGC² Byline 6

ObeyGC²: Loving God by loving others

One of the main ways to demonstrate emphasis in Hebrew culture and writings was through repetition. Jesus clearly had some things He wanted to emphasize because He was fairly repetitious on some subjects. One of these subjects was that love is directly tied to obedience. Specifically, our love for Him is intimately related to our obedience of Him. He was also extremely clear in stating that a primary command He intended for us to obey was that we love others and show it in practical ways. This is a great way to summarize what ObeyGC² is all about.

John 14:15

15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command."

John 14:23-24

23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 24 He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me."

John 15:9-13

9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

1 John 5:1-3
5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. 2 This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. 3 This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.

1 John 2:3-6, 9-11
3 We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. 4 The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

9 Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. 10 Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. 11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.

2 John 4b-6
5 I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. 6 And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

ObeyGC² Byline 7

ObeyGC²: Glorifying God by serving others

Since all of history and life finds its purpose in bringing glory to God, it seems as if we might want to pay attention to how we might do this. It turns out that one way to bring glory to God from others is to show forth a life of service and good deeds. We

don't live a life of service to others for what we can get out of it but for what God can get out of it.

Matt 5:13-16

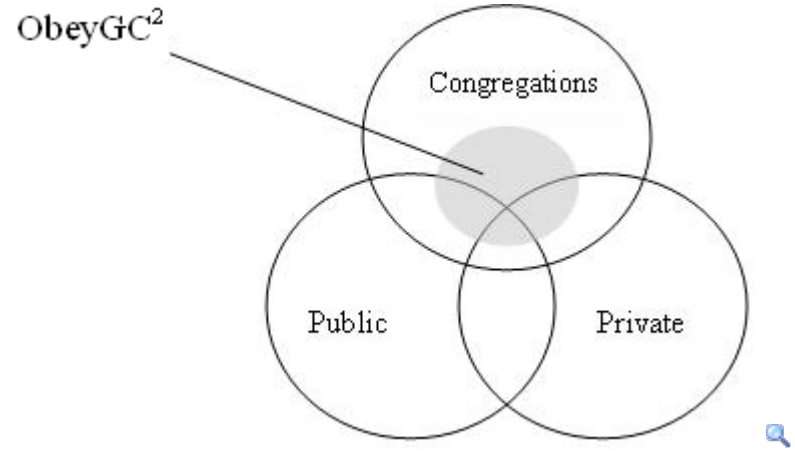
13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that **they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.**

1 Peter 2:12-17
12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, **they may see your good deeds and glorify God** on the day he visits us.

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. 15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. 16 Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. 17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

ObeyGC² Byline 8



ObeyGC²: Make a difference together

This tag emphasizes the cooperative nature of ObeyGC² It is the power of working together which makes it so potentially impactful. Not only can we work together with others in the church, but also, when agendas coincide, we can work with public

(government) and private (NGO, business, parachurch) enterprise in a show of support for values we share. I've addressed the issue of cooperative effort within the church in previous entries. Now I'd like to propose some guidelines for cooperative effort outside the church.

1. ObeyGC[2] does not need to be redefined in order for collaborative efforts to occur. It already provides a framework for collaboration. Often practical quality of life issues are of common interest among public, private and church sectors. The task is to discover where the legitimate concerns of each sector overlap and focus the collaboration on that area of overlap. Each sector has its own unique and God-given area of responsibility and concern and each sector will already recognize many of its own particular distinctive spheres of influence. What must be redefined is the perception of the role and spirit of the church in working with the public and private sectors on common areas of concern.
2. When communicating to congregations (or individual Christians) we need to point out that it is an effectiveness and stewardship matter that they collaborate with public and private sectors whenever it is possible or feasible.
    1. This will often mean that congregations must initiate the relationship.
    2. This also means that congregations should be responsive to overtures from the private and public sector when appropriate.
3. Suggestions for parameters of collaborative efforts:
    1. Ask about felt-need issues felt by the potential partner(s). These issues will often be easiest to collaborate on if they are framed in terms of people or how people are affected.
    2. Present the role of the congregation as that of a servant.
    3. Jointly discuss possible contributions by each of the current and potential partners, with each party focusing on its own potential areas of contribution.
4. Whenever possible, seek to break down or minimize “us/them” references by recognizing and capitalizing on overlaps in constituency. (We are part of them and they are part of us. E.g., some of our members may be in local government and some of the local government officials may be members of our congregation.)
5. Seek to make the first step an event or project of very limited duration. Follow this up with discussions on possible next steps and/or longer term collaborative efforts. This will provide all parties with a comfortable escape clause and help to identify individuals within each of the partner groups which might be open to ongoing efforts related to the issue.

Rom 12:17b-18
Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

ObeyGC² Byline 9

ObeyGC²: Ordinary radicals working together

Ironically, ObeyGC² will probably be most effective when obviously unremarkable people practice it. It will then be obvious that it is God who is responsible for anything of value which is accomplished. The other obvious testimony to this fact will be if we work together in unity as Jesus prayed we would. I love the illustration of a turtle on a fencepost. If you are ever walking along and see a turtle on a fencepost, you don't say, "Wow! What an amazing turtle!" Instead you start looking around to see who put the turtle on the fencepost.

1 Cor 1:26-31

26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-and the things that are not-to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

John 17:20-23
20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

ObeyGC² Byline 10

ObeyGC²: Working out your faith

Most of us who seek to follow the Lord have figured out that it isn't a one-time decision. We have to daily die to ourselves and follow Him. In fact, we must choose to obey moment by moment. It is this process which God uses to perfect us, molding us into the image of Christ *and* the process through which He uses us to accomplish His purposes in the world.

Luke 9:23-24

23 Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."

Phil 2:12-15

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed-not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence-continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

14 Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.

Eph 2:10
10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Rom 8:29
29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

ObeyGC² Byline 11

ObeyGC²: Activism with a purpose

We have an eternal reason for what we do. Whatever happens in our earthly lifetime is of little consequence compared with what happens in eternity. When Paul summarizes what the essentials of the gospel are, one of the few issues that he chooses to mention is the coming judgment. Since it is coming, and we need to be ready for it, that means we need to get busy getting ourselves and others prepared for it. Time is limited. The matter is urgent and important. It deserves all our attention and energy and resources.

1 Peter 1:13-17

13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. 14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

2 Peter 3:10-14

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

James 2:14-18

14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

2 Cor 4:16-18

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

ObeyGC² Byline 12

ObeyGC²: Let's build the world we've always wanted

While this doesn't communicate the heart and soul of ObeyGC², it does provide some common ground with non-Christian partners with whom we may have the opportunity to work. We are quite clear on the fact that we'll never see God's will done on earth as it is in heaven until Christ's return. That doesn't excuse us, however, from the responsibility of being a force for preservation and good while we remain here. We do have a responsibility to work together with community and government leaders to carry out their God-given responsibilities. ObeyGC² is an avenue to do that.

Matt 5:13a

13 "You are the salt of the earth.

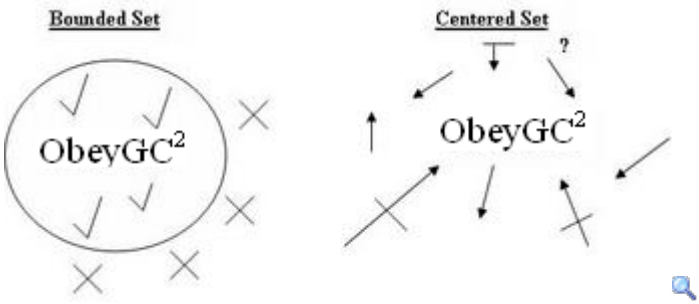
Col 4:5-6
5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Rom 13:1-10
13:1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. 4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

ObeyGC² Values



I believe we should not (and perhaps cannot) define ObeyGC² in an airtight fashion which will allow us to determine what is and isn't ObeyGC² For starters, it just isn't practical. We must rather give a general definition and then carefully enunciate the values and principles that will ideally characterize ObeyGC² The result will be a

situation in which we are not dealing with the construct of ObeyGC^2 activities as a bounded set but rather as a centered set. The question at hand when planning and evaluating opportunities will not be, “Is this ObeyGC^2 or not?” but rather “How can we respond in a way that is as ObeyGC^2-like as possible?” The values and principles can then be considered as benchmarks to shoot for. Arrows with a hash in the centered set diagram would be considered ObeyGC^2-like because they would in general represent most of the values of ObeyGC^2 This is less alienating for “non-ObeyGC^2” practitioners, leaving the door open for influence and interaction in order to make their activities as fruitful and effective as possible *and* continues to challenge ObeyGC^2 practitioners to improve and refine their work.

A partial list of ObeyGC^2 values would include: high-leverage, strategic, sustainable, reproducing, scaling, wholistic, efficient, coordinated, intentional, glorifying God, congregation-centric, addresses greatest needs, community-based, viralocity, training (not teaching), oral-friendly, love-motivated, prioritize least/last/lost, effective, local ownership, transferable, do no harm, listen and learn before acting, do and train, presence before projects, team-based, respects the church, involves every member, transformational, respects local community leaders, exit strategy if not in home community, etc. This is not an exhaustive list, but a representative list. I intend to write a blog entry on each of these values.

To summarize, the values of ObeyGC^2 are principles which should be used in order to ensure that our activities are as effective and as efficient as possible. This is a matter of stewardship of the time, energy and resources which God has given us.

Matt 25:19-21

19 "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"

High-leverage

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is high-leverage.

This is just another way to say working smart. The point is that the outcomes are large when compared to the inputs. This can be achieved in any number of ways, but it will nearly always include the involvement of as many people as possible downline. In other words any time I am doing something, I should involve those I am doing it with and those I am doing it for in doing it for someone else later. Leverage can also be achieved through engaging idle resources.

Phil 3:17-18

17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

2 Tim 2:1-3
2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

Strategic

One of the ObeyGC[2] values is that work is strategic.

Being strategic means that it is an intentional part of a larger coherent plan. Another way of looking at it is that it employs system thinking, recognizing and incorporating plans to deal with unintended consequences and the constellation of issues which will be affected by one's actions. The larger strategy is ultimately God's plan to glorify Himself and establish His Kingdom. A subset of that larger strategy is the blessing of all peoples and the restoration of mankind and indeed all creation. In this regard, it might be helpful to ask this question before acting: "How can this best bring glory to God?"

Gen 12:3
3 I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."

Rom 8:19-21
19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

2 Cor 5:17-19
17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Sustainable

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is sustainable.

The point of this value is that something can be carried on after the initiator has left the scene. Often, this requires capacity-building to take place rather than simply doing things *for* people. Sustainability ensures that the benefits of the work will be continuing and durable.

What is not sustainable? Providing a pump which the recipients cannot repair if it breaks. Building a structure which cannot be properly maintained. Doing a task for someone which they cannot duplicate or train others to do.

John 15:16a
16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-fruit that will last.

Reproducing

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is reproducing.

This is a more emphatic way to say reproducible. If it is reproducing then it *can be* reproduced and it *is being* reproduced. Actually the same thing should have been said about the value of being "sustainable"...it should actually be "sustaining." In my mind, being reproducible has two major components. First, it can be reproduced. This means that whatever is being done can be repeated with local resources and abilities. This might require capacity building within the community. This often requires that training approaches be adjusted for local context. For example, if the community has mostly oral-preference learners then training should be put into an oral-friendly format. The second aspect requires that there be *accountability structures* within the community for the reproduction of the benefits connected with the work. What gets measured or inspected gets done.

1 Cor 9:19-23

19 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Heb 13:17

17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Scaling

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is scaling.

Similar to the value of "reproducing," "scaling" implies not only that it is scalable (able to be scaled) but that it actually does scale. Jesus loved to use agricultural illustrations, partly because God uses similar principles in nature that He does in spiritual life. Seeds are a great illustration of scaling. Not only can they multiply themselves, but each of the resulting seeds can also multiply, resulting in true scaling. Again, the actual scaling implies some sort of accountability structure in practice. What is measured/inspected is what actually gets done. I think of scaling as reproducing on steroids. To me it implies continuing reproduction, most likely with more than one offspring per generation.

Mark 4:20
20 Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop-thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown."

2 Cor 9:8-10
8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9 As it is written:

"He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever."

10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

Wholistic

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is wholistic.

Yes, I am aware that the word is properly spelled "holistic." I'm trying to start a trend so bear with me. No one (who understands reality) has any doubt that spiritual welfare is more important than physical welfare. As Jesus said in Mark 8:36-37, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" If we feed and heal and educate a person and give him a utopian existence but fail to meet his spiritual need we have done him no good at all in the long run. For some reason, however, God seems to care a great deal about the physical welfare of people as well, and in fact, He ties our love for Him to our practical expressions of love for our fellow-man in the physical realm. Only God

knows why He chooses to emphasize these temporary issues as a necessary supplement to meeting the more important eternal needs, but He does. We need to pay attention to that fact.

James 1:27
27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Mic 6:8
8 He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

Efficient

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is efficient.

This is a matter of stewardship. The Lord wants us to make wise use of whatever He gives us. In the parable of the talents we see that He will reward those who make good use of what He gives them. One of the up-sides of this is that He will give more to whomever makes wise use of what He has already given them. God is not a foolish investor. He invests more in people who are consistently giving Him a good return on His investments in them. If our goal is to bring maximum glory to God, we want to be one of those people.

Eph 5:15-16

15 Be very careful, then, how you live-not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Matt 25:23, 29-30

23 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

...
29 For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Coordinated

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is coordinated.

This implies that it is cooperative. For some odd reason, God has equated our love of others with our love of Him. He has chosen to tie our status as His children with our status as siblings of His other children and seems to think that our getting along with them is pretty important. This actually means we need to work together with them. In fact, He goes so far as to actually say we are actually part of one body. This is a major point in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. If we are one body, let's be a coordinated body and not a clumsy one.

Rom 12:3-5

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. 4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

1 Cor 12:27

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Eph 4:1-6
2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to one hope when you were called- 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Intentional

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is intentional.

In other words, it's more than random acts of kindness. Random acts of kindness are wonderful and we need to do them. But we mustn't stop there. We have a purpose for our lives and so we need to live it purposefully and minister purposefully.

1 Cor 3:7-9a
7 Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers.

Gal 4:18
18 It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you.

Phil 2:2-4
2 Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Phil 2:12-13

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed-not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence-continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

2 Thess 1:11

11 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith.

Glorifying God

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is to glorify God.

Have a look at the first blog entry on this site for a discussion of the centrality of glorifying God, not only for ObeyGC^2 but for all of life and history. Learning how to do this in all of life is a life-time process, but there are some basics that are "givens" in any situation. First, one needs to live a life controlled by the Holy Spirit. No one can live a life pleasing to God without doing that. This requires a continual filling of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, unity among believers is essential for the Lord to be glorified. There are several passages which teach this. Thirdly, credit needs to go to Jesus for any good thing which is done. He is the head of the body, His church, and God will not share His glory with anyone.

Eph 1:13b-14
Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-to the praise of his glory.

Rom 15:5-6

5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Phil 2:9-11
9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Congregation-centric

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is congregation-centric.

This is to say that the church in its local expression should be the central actor. This can obviously be a subset of a local church, but they act on behalf of the body. We are God's representatives and it is in that role which we do anything of eternal value. The responsibility for meeting needs and doing God's will in the world belongs to the church. Unfortunately, much that could be done and should be done but isn't done is an indictment against the church. In many times and many places we have abdicated the responsibility which God has given us to be a blessing to every family on earth. We need to involve *every* follower of Jesus in living out this heritage. We are to be salt, light and leaven in this world. We should provide an example and be a good partner in working for good with both public and private enterprise, with faith-based organizations and any other men and women of goodwill which we can find. We are responsible to lead out and to do what we can as God's representatives in our local communities and beyond.

Eph 2:19-22
19 You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Col 1:24-29

24 Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. 25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness- 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. 27 To them God has chosen to make

known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. 29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

Addresses Greatest Needs

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work prioritizes the areas of greatest need.

This means that work focuses on places with the greatest lostness, especially in terms of having the least access to the gospel. This takes the form of prioritizing work among UEGs (unengaged people groups) whenever possible. UEGs are ethnolinguistic people groups among whom there are no intentional church planting efforts taking place. You can see a list of peoplegroups online at www.peoplegroups.org. Of the roughly 12,000 people groups in the world, about 3,500 are UEGs. Most of these have populations of less than 100,000 and one reason they are unengaged is that it is not efficient for missions organizations to commit resources to reach them because there are much larger groups which are still very unreached. Local churches nearby these UEGs, but composed of a different people group are often the best placed to take responsibility for beginning outreach to the UEGs.

We also need to target the areas of greatest poverty, greatest illness, greatest injustice, greatest ignorance, etc. If you work in a slum you can ask people who is poor and they will nearly always be able to identify people who are worse off than they are. There is often a degree of satisfaction among the relatively poor, but absolute destitution is a serious matter which deserves priority attention. HIV-AIDS is an example of a "greatest illness" although in some places it is not the only affliction deserving immediate attention. Malaria, or even simple diarrhea can be devastating in some places. Severe injustices such as sex slavery fall into a similar category. Especially in some Muslim societies such as Afghanistan, the education of girls is a major issue.

Every community also has one or more issues which are the most severe. In many places which are prosperous physically there is great spiritual darkness. Much of Western Europe comes to mind in this regard. Locally we need to address the greatest need. Globally we need to do what we can to bring light to the darkest places.

Matt 9:10-13

10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Community-based

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is community-based.

Long-term, if work is going to be ongoing and scalable, the resources and expertise must come from within the community where it takes place. This means that capacity building must often be a key component of the work. People must learn how to effectively use the resources they already have at their disposal as well as learning how to generate additional resources in many cases.

The aspect of being community-based is also related to the value of being congregation-centric. Worldwide, many communities already have a church in their midst, and this church needs to play a significant role as a banner-bearer in the work. If there is no church, there is not likely to be a banner-bearer which will persist unless and until a church is planted. Governments change, leaders come and go, but churches remain. Individual congregations may die, but the Kingdom of God will continue and persist and nearby congregations can take up the responsibility until another church is planted in the community. If local ownership and leadership are not established from the beginning of the process, there will not be enough motivation to continue the process of community renewal and building once any outside partners leave.

1 Thess 4:11-12

11 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

1 Tim 5:8
8 If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Eph 4:28
28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

Viralocity

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is characterized by viralocity.

As far as I know, viralocity is a new word. Don't look for it in the dictionary. It means quickly and widely spreading. If something is going to be quickly and widely

spreading it will have several characteristics. First, it will be simple. Complex things do not easily and quickly replicate. Think about it. An organism's complexity and size are generally inverse to the number of that type of organism which exist. There are a whole lot more bacteria than people. There are far more plankton than there are blue whales. There are more mice than there are elephants. You get the picture.

Second, something with viralocity must have clear advantages over something which it replaces or changes and there must be sufficient dissatisfaction with the current situation. That dissatisfaction must either be created or brought to light before the new solution can achieve viralocity.

Thirdly, there must be a motivation for the new pattern or solution to be passed on. People must want to have this viralicious [another new word] pattern or solution and to pass it on to others. Fortunately, as they say, "good news travels fast."

1 Cor 2:1-5
2:1 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. 2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

Eph 4:22-24
22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

2 Tim 2:2
2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

Training (not teaching)

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is done by training rather than merely teaching.

OK, maybe this is just semantics, but there is an important principle here. When we hear the word "teaching" we tend to connote the idea of mental acquisition without any assumed effect upon a person's behavior. The word "training" is usually used in such a way as to connote a behavior which is learned. For some reason, though, training is often viewed as a lower level of instruction, though it is often far more practical. At any rate, ObeyGC^2 is about helping people change their lives for the better and become involved in helping others change their lives for the better. In other words, it is a training of practitioner-trainers in areas which will improve lives both

spiritually and physically. It is not interested in creating ivory tower theories or theorists, but in changing lives.

Rom 6:11-14

11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. 14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Titus 2:11-15a

11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope-the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. 15 These, then, are the things you should teach.

Titus 3:14
14 Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.

1 Peter 3:1-2
3:1 Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, 2 when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

2 Cor 5:17-18
17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

Oral-friendly

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is oral-friendly.

What do I mean by oral-friendly? I mean that it is appropriate for oral-preference learners. It turns out that most people in the world are oral-preference learners. This includes all people who are illiterate or functionally illiterate as well as many other people. Among the least, the last and the lost, people who suffer the most from spiritual darkness, abuse, poverty, illness, and ignorance, the overwhelming majority are oral-preference learners. Such people do not learn effectively from structured arguments, outlines, and so on. They learn most effectively from demonstrations and

from stories. This is a huge issue which has only hit the mainstream in the Christian world in the past few years. If you are not familiar with this issue, you are in the majority. I'd like to recommend a couple of websites for you to browse in order to begin to familiarize yourself with issues related to orality. The best place to start is www.chronologicalbiblestorying.com. A good follow-up site is www.oralbible.com. If we want to help most people then we need to accommodate ourselves to them and that includes equipping them in the manner they can best learn in.

1 Cor 9:19-23

19 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Love-motivated

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is love-motivated.

Motive counts. Love is the motive God looks for. Love is demonstrated by obedience. Our "good works" from any other heart is worthless. Isaiah 64:6a says, "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags." Doing the right thing for the wrong reason or out of a heart not submitted to God is not doing any good. Obviously, every one of us has a mix of motives and none of us truly knows our own hearts completely. God is willing to continue to work in us to mature us and overlooks less than stellar motives just as He overlooks other sins, as long as our heart is submitted to Him. If we want to please Him, we need to check our hearts and commit ourselves anew to doing His will.

Matt 7:21-23

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

1 Cor 13:1-7
13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but

have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Prioritize the Least/Last/Lost

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work prioritizes the least, the last and the lost.

Throughout the Old Testament God made it very clear through the Law and the Prophets that He has a special concern for those who are weak and suffering. There is a refrain of commands to care for orphans, widows, the destitute, the mistreated, foreigners, the helpless. There is also a refrain of concern for the "nations" or "Gentiles." The idea behind this word both in the New and Old Testaments is that of ethnolinguistic people groups. From the call of Abraham in Genesis 12 straight through to Revelation 5 and 7, God communicates a deep concern that ***ALL*** people groups come to know Him and serve Him. Guess what? God still cares for the weak and suffering. God also still wants people from ***EVERY*** people group to come to know Him and serve Him. Unfortunately there are more weak and suffering people than ever. In fact, there will always be weak and suffering people until Jesus returns; as Jesus noted in John 12:8a, "You will always have the poor among you." We know, however, that isn't the case regarding the people groups. All of them will hear before Jesus returns. In Matthew 24:14 Jesus said, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." ObeyGC^2 intends to make sure there are no people groups without an ongoing witness. This is one its priority goals.

Luke 14:12-14

12 Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Rev 5:9b-10

"You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.

10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth."

Effective

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is effective.

I don't know what your perception of God is, but believe it or not, He cares about return on investment (ROI). This is somewhat difficult to comprehend sometimes because He seems to make some strange decisions such as entrusting His work on earth to His followers instead of simply doing it Himself. But I digress...

Whether it is the parable of the talents or the parable of the sower and the seed or another of Jesus' teachings, He repeatedly makes it clear that He is looking for results and reproductivity at the end of the day. Of course, faithfulness and obedience are the bottom line. There is some truth to the old saying, "Evangelism is sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results up to God." On the other hand, God gave us brains and creativity and abilities and wisdom for a purpose. He wants us to use them or rather to invest them for maximum benefit for His Kingdom. That was the whole point of the parable of the talents. God wants fruit in our lives and from our ministries.

There are several ways we can increase our fruit (besides the obvious ones of maximizing all the abilities God has given us and all the abilities we can recruit or borrow from others). We can remain in His Word and have His Word in us. We can remain in Him and have His Spirit in us. We can submit to His discipline. We can pray. Jesus summed all this up beautifully in John 15.

John 15:1-8
15:1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in
me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will
be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to
you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it
must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will
bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in me,
he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up,
thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you,
ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that
you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

Local Ownership

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work have local ownership.

This is important in order that the work might have continuity, sustainability, and the capacity for scalability and reproductivity. Local people in every place need to "buy in" if the work is going to continue, grow and expand. Local resources must be maximized and developed. No project is going to prosper in the long term which depends on outside resources, whether it is people, money, or anything else.

This means that local people need to be involved from the beginning of the process. They need to be involved in the research phase, the planning phase, and the execution phase. Not just involved, but leading or at least co-leading. The church, if it exists, needs to be a key player from the beginning. If it doesn't exist, planting a church should be one of the early goals. Community leaders in general should be involved and consulted (on the non-"spiritual" aspects) whether or not they are Christians.

Titus 1:5
5 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.

Rom 13:1-5
13:1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. 4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

Titus 3:1-2
3:1 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, 2 to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.

Transferable

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is transferable.

This implies that work should be simple, appropriate and sticky. I discussed the concept of simplicity in the entry on viralocity and gave an example of appropriateness in the entry on oral-friendly. Appropriateness can also deal with issues of language, education level, income level, socioeconomic factors, ethnolinguistic factors and so on. The question is whether or not work is able to be replicated in a natural fashion.

Stickiness refers to the idea of being memorable and, in a sense, life-changing. Someone once said something like this: "The human mind, once it encounters a new idea can never be the same as it was before." The degree to which this is true for an idea is related to its stickiness. Stickiness also is determined by the "purple cow" effect, that is, how notable and novel something is. The Gospel of the Kingdom is sticky.

Simplicity and appropriateness determine *if* something is transferable. Stickiness relates more to *whether* something is transferred or not.

1 Cor 1:18-25

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us
who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written:
"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will
frustrate."
20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this
age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom
of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the
foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand
miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a
stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has
called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For
the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is
stronger than man's strength.

Do No Harm

One of the ObeyGC[2] values is that work does no harm.

The Hippocratic Oath refers to the oath taken by medical doctors and one of the key phrases is that they will "do no harm" in their medical service. It dates back to the Greek Hippocrates. Just as that oath is a cornerstone of medical ethics, we should have a similar attitude in our ministry for the Kingdom. Unfortunately, much harm has been done in the name of the Kingdom which has crippled and disabled and demotivated the very people who were intended to be helped. Often this is in terms of creating dependency or at least an attitude of helplessness among people who are being served. Dependency is a huge topic. One of my favorite writers on the subject, Glen Schwarz, has a website that is a great place to acquaint yourself with the basics of the topic. You can access a list of articles on that website at http://www.wmausa.org/98600.ihtml. Much of the plight of sub-Saharan Africa today can be largely attributed to poorly conceived efforts to help there. That happens to be where Glen lived and served for a number of years so he has seen this problem up close. The greatest tragedy of dependency is that it creates a pattern of looking out for help rather than up (to God) and inwardly to see how to use what God has already given.

Isa 31:1
Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help,
who rely on horses,
who trust in the multitude of their chariots
and in the great strength of their horsemen,
but do not look to the Holy One of Israel,
or seek help from the LORD.

Listen and Learn Before Acting

One of the ObeyGC[2] values is that one should listen and learn before acting.

This is not only a principle in good missiology, but a good principle for life in general as well. First, we will be better received if we do this. We should always go as learners before training others. This is definitely not an issue of becoming a subject matter expert on something. Training is all about taking someone from where they are to where you want them to be in knowledge, attitude and ability. Being a subject matter expert in some field only enables you to know where you want to get someone to. It does not equip you to know where you are taking them from. That requires *learning from them*. It requires *relationship*. Your training or serving cannot be appropriate without this process.

James 1:19

19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

1 Thess 2:6b-8
As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, 7 but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. 8 We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

Do and Train

One of the ObeyGC[2] values is that people should both do ministry and train others to do it.

This means to live it as well as speak it. Practice it and pass it on. Apply it and not simply theorize about it. There is a name for people who only teach others without having experienced something themselves: hypocrite. Many people have heard the old saying, "Those who can't do, teach. Those who can't teach, administrate." Unfortunately, this saying probably brings specific people to mind for each of us. That is not God's intention, however. God wants us all to be learners and doers and trainers of others. We can learn from anyone. There is no truly great person who is too proud

to learn from others. Everyone has things they are good at and areas of weakness or ignorance. God designed us in this way so we could help one another and learn from one another. Humility really is the key to growth.

Also, God is a wise investor. He gives more insight to those who pass on the insights He's given them. He reveals more of Himself to those who reveal Him to others. He gives more to those who give away what He has given them. This principle is clearly taught in the parable of the talents and is repeated in one way or another throughout Scripture. For example, Luke 12:48 "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." Or Matthew 10:8 "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give." Or 2 Timothy 2:2 "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." Or Matthew 28:19-20a "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." You get the idea...

Matt 5:17-19

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Ex 18:20
20 Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform.

Ezra 7:9b-10
The good hand of his God was upon him.

10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel. (NAS)

Presence Before Projects

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that presence should precede projects.

This was the pattern of Jesus' ministry. This was the pattern of Paul's ministry. The presence does not have to be of you personally, but it should be of someone personally if we are talking about discipling someone and not merely announcing the Good News to them. The same principle applies for other forms of ministry besides the "spiritual"

forms. In any sort of ministry it is next to impossible to equip people to help themselves and others without a relational presence. First people need to learn how to use what God has given them more effectively. Then they need to learn how to increase their resources and abilities so they can continue to grow and develop. Then they need to learn how to help others do these things. Then and only then (in a development situation) is it the ideal time to consider applying outside resources into a problem. Any time prior to this is disempowering. (Of course these considerations do not apply in a rescue/relief situation, but we often use relief approaches when development approaches are called for. The difference is that a relief situation is a life-saving operation and generally is an acute rather than chronic one.)

Luke 22:24-27

24 Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. 25 Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. 26 But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. 27 For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

1 Thess 1:4-7

4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

1 Thess 2:10-12

10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Team-based

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is team-based.

Have you ever noticed that Jesus always sent His disciples out in pairs? Have you noticed that all the missionary journeys recorded in the Bible were team affairs? Teamwork and cooperation seem to be at a premium throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Ask Moses about it. Jethro helped save him from a nervous breakdown with his advice on how to establish a ministry team. God designed the

church, His body, to function interdependently as well, which requires teamwork and cooperation if we are to accomplish what He intends for us. The wisest man in the world had a little to say about it as well in Ecclesiastes:

Eccl 4:9-12

9 Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their work:
10 If one falls down,
his friend can help him up.
But pity the man who falls
and has no one to help him up!
11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.
But how can one keep warm alone?
12 Though one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

1 Cor 3:5-9
5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe-as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

1 Cor 12:14-27

14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Respects the Church

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work always respects the church.

This not only applies to the universal Church with a capital "C" but also to local congregations. The church is the bride of Christ. If we love Christ we need to respect and love and honor His bride. One doesn't come without the other. We can't love the Head without loving the body. They are one (or will be), just as the Father and the Son are one. (Jesus said that, by the way, not me.) In a practical way this means that the local church, if it exists, should be included and involved both in the planning and leading and doing of the work. In their community they are the God-ordained representatives of the Kingdom. If they don't have a vision for the work, do what you can to help increase their vision. If their approach is all "wrong" and not ObeyGC^2-like then do what you can to help them grow into ObeyGC^2-ness. If only a small part of the church is interested or even spiritually alive then do what you can to help the entire body understand their calling and fulfill it. Of course, the path of planting new churches is *always* a good one, but involve existing churches in the process if you can...a local parent is always better than a distant one. God honors the church. God will exalt His church and grant her authority in His Kingdom. Let's get started working with Him on it right now!

Eph 5:23-28
Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Col 1:18
18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Involves Every Member

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work involves every member.

That is, every member of the church. This is for practical as well as theological reasons. Practically speaking, "Many hands make light work." One of the major reasons the giants of spiritual lostness, self-centered leadership, poverty, illness and ignorance are so large and so widespread and so severe is that in many respects only "professionals" have been engaged in battling them. Most ordinary people are not

involved in dealing with medical issues because they view that as the realm of medical professionals. Most education issues are left to the educational professionals. Most church-planting is left to religious professionals, and so on. There is not a good reason for this. There are basic but important contributions which can and should be made by ordinary people with basic equipping in all these areas. If more people were making such contributions then the professionals could have a significant amount of their time and resources freed up to deal with the more advanced issues that do require professional intervention. Two billion people claim to be Christians. What if all of these were regularly using their discretionary time to minister in simple ways to battle these evil giants?

God has made it clear that as His family, His body, His bride, His followers, we are to be involved in meeting needs in these various areas. Jesus spent His time doing that. He taught His disciples to do that. The Bible tells us to do that. The Holy Spirit guides us to do that. There are a few fringe theologians who believe that Jesus' commands to His disciples, such as the Great Commission, were only given to the Twelve. If that is the case then we are "off the hook" so to speak. Unfortunately for those of us who are lazy, those people are regarded as crazy by most of the body of Christ and that thought would have been considered ludicrous throughout church history. The fact of the matter is that God intends for us all to be engaged in service for the Kingdom.

Eph 2:10
10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Transformational

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work is transformational.

This is related to the idea that work is wholistic but it goes beyond that. The wholism aspect is that all work has a spiritual aspect which transforms people. Transformational, however also brings in the idea of "systems thinking" and the idea of being developmental. Systems thinking means we view situations in terms of the entire environment rather than viewing people as somehow separate from the environment or community in which they find themselves. Developmental thinking causes us to think of the process of helping people grow in their capacity to care for themselves and assist others. The result of taking a transformational approach is that we help people make changes that last and that are mutually reinforcing. We do not merely view persons wholistically but we view communities and environments and sometimes even nations wholistically as we respond to areas of need.

The bottom line is that God is concerned about a whole range of issues and of righting systemic wrongs. He wants us to be concerned as well and to act accordingly. He wants us to do so wholistically and developmentally.

Jonah 4:10-11

10 But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 11 But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

Ex 3:7-8

7 The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.

1 Cor 9:9-10
9 For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? 10 Surely he says this for us, doesn't he?

Respects Local Community Leaders

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work respects local community leaders.

This makes good sense from a practical perspective as well as simply being the right thing to do. Since ObeyGC^2 work aims to be transformational, it is concerned with the entire community environment. Local community leaders play a major role in shaping the local environment. Generally, the more they can "buy in" to work and the more community-based the work is, the better chance it has to continue and prosper over the long haul.

Respecting the local community leaders also sets a good example for local believers and provides a good witness for those who are not yet believers. Clearly God wants us to respect our leaders and we can best represent Him when we model that.

Rom 13:1-7
13:1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. 4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Exit Strategy (if not in home community)

One of the ObeyGC^2 values is that work has an exit strategy if it is not in one's home community.

This is essential in order to avoid dependency. I've discussed dependency resources in another entry, but I wanted to mention another book on the subject. Steve Saint, son of missionary martyr Nate Saint, has written a book called "The Great Omission" which describes dependency in a fresh way. An exit strategy touches on many of the other values I've discussed. It probably most directly relates to reproducing, scaling, community-based, viralocity, training (not teaching), local ownership, do no harm, and transformational. The point is that work is not going to be as empowering or developmental as it needs to be if someone does not phase themselves out of the work and phase in local leadership and manpower. This process should begin from day one and be intentional.

The training cycle summarizes this process: model, assist, watch and leave. At first you will do something or train something that is new. You are modeling. Then you will help a local person do or train that new thing. This is assisting. Then you will watch as they do it on their own and be available as a consultant. This is watching. Once they have demonstrated the ability to repeat these three stages in the next generation of learners, you leave. I like to compare this to teaching someone to ride a bicycle. The first step is the person seeing someone ride a bicycle (model). The next is holding the bicycle (assisting) while they pedal. The next step is watching them try and often fail and get back on and try again. When they have the skill learned and know the rules of the road, the trainer leaves. The learner can then help someone else learn to ride. The leaving is important! If my parents had to watch me every time I rode my bike, I wouldn't get to ride too often. (I'm in my 40's!)

Paul clearly used this pattern in his missionary activity, but that's a bit long to look into in a brief blog entry. These first verses are excerpts of his address to the leaders of the church he planted at Ephesus and give a glimpse into these stages.

Acts 20:25, 28, 32, 35

25 Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again.
...

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his

own blood.
...

32 Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

...
35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

2 Tim 1:13

13 What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.

1 Cor 11:1-2
11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

2 I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.